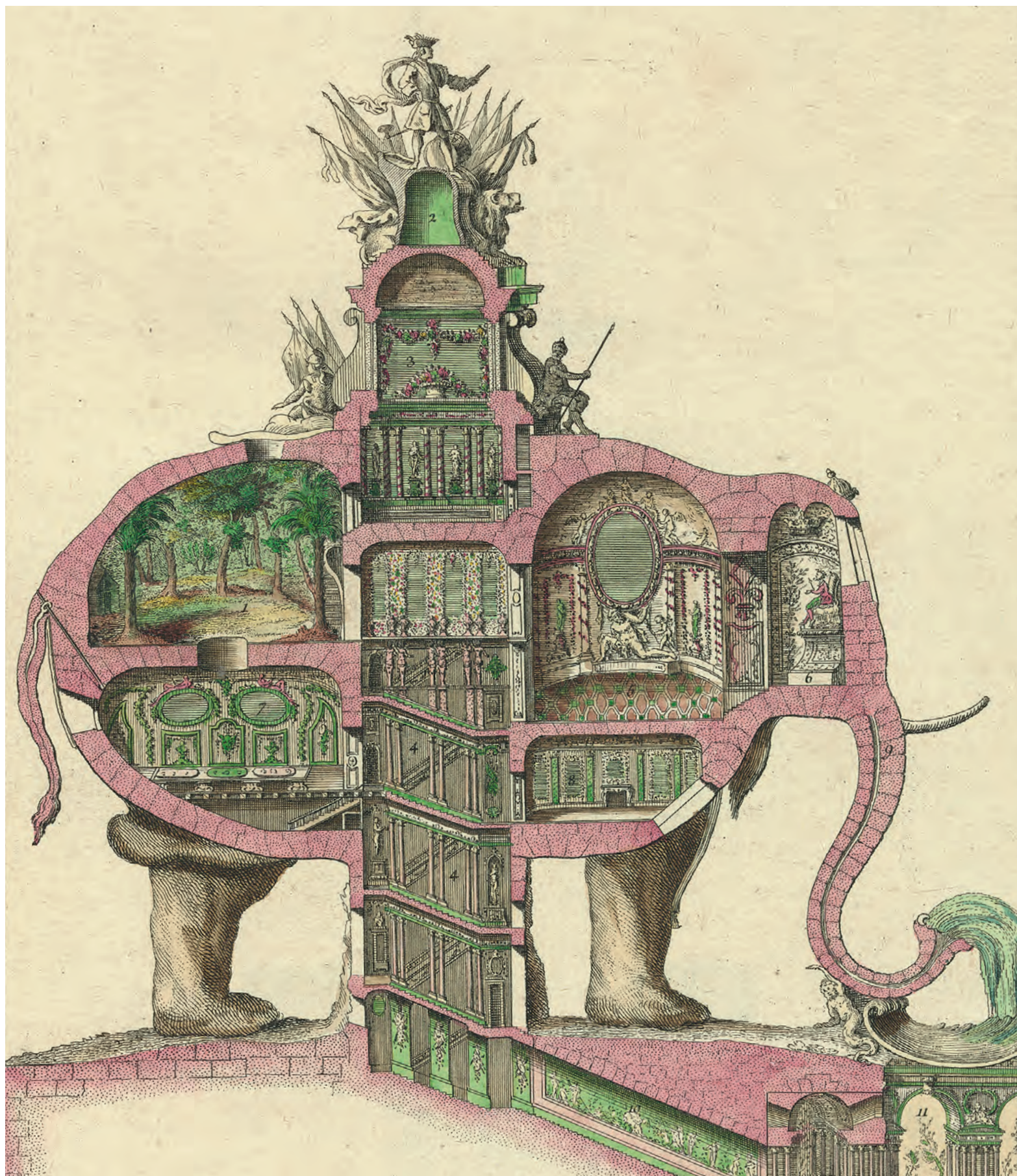




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NEW YORK



In memory of Julie Jones (1935-2021)

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Back cover illustration: Kneeling female figure, 15th–early 16th century. Mexico, Mesoamerica, Aztec. See fig. 5, p. 17.

Illustration on p. 2: Pierre Patte after Charles François Ribart de Chamoust. Section view of Ribart's elephant monument from Ribart 1758, pl. VI. Hand-colored etching. See fig. 4, p. 86.

Illustration on p. 4: Mask. Mexico. Olmec, 900–400 B.C. Jadeite, H. 5¼ × W. 5½ × D. 3 in. (14.6 × 14 × 7.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Alice K. Bache, 1977 (1977.187.33)

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MANUSCRIPT GUIDELINES FOR THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM JOURNAL

Founded in 1968, the *Metropolitan Museum Journal* is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal published annually that features original research on the history, interpretation, conservation, and scientific examination of works of art in the Museum's collection. Its range encompasses the diversity of artistic practice from antiquity to the present day. The *Journal* encourages contributions offering critical and innovative approaches that will further our understanding of works of art.

The *Journal* publishes **Articles** and **Research Notes**. All texts must take works of art in the collection as the point of departure. **Articles** contribute extensive and thoroughly argued scholarship, whereas **Research Notes** are often smaller in scope, focusing on a specific aspect of new research or presenting a significant finding from technical analysis. The maximum length for articles is 8,000 words (including endnotes) and 10–12 images, and for research notes 4,000 words with 4–6 images. Authors may consult previous volumes of the *Journal* as they prepare submissions: www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications. The *Journal* does not accept papers that have been previously published elsewhere, nor does it accept translations of such works.

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ABBREVIATIONS

MMA The Metropolitan Museum of Art
MMAB *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*
MMJ *Metropolitan Museum Journal*

Height precedes width and then depth in dimensions cited.

METROPOLITAN
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JOURNAL 56

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

Since its foundation in 1870, The Metropolitan Museum of Art has played a distinctive role in the cultural life of New York and sought to make art available to a broad public. Over time, its audiences have become national and global, and public education through the promotion of art and culture has remained central to the Museum's mission. At the same time, the Museum has always encouraged scholarly investigation of its rich and ever-growing collection.

Conceived in the optimistic aftermath of the American Civil War, the Museum was founded by artists, writers, collectors, and businessmen—visionary private citizens whose viewpoints launched a museum different in character from the state- and princely-sponsored institutions in Europe they hoped to rival. Since The Met opened its doors, the world has changed, and we now face exponentially complex challenges. Globalization has mobilized processes of integration in terms of systems of knowledge, and the international impact of economies and cultures has been fueled by powerful digital networks. Online resources have transformed The Met's reach and relevance and will continue to do so in ways that are tremendously exciting yet not entirely predictable. The pace at which change is occurring presents a continuing challenge to understanding who we are and how the Museum must remain relevant in a world characterized by uncertainty. It gives us reason to pause and reflect on the needs of diverse audiences and even what constitutes "art." As we proceed through the early decades of the twenty-first century, our ambition is to ensure meaningful experiences for those who visit our museum and those who access its collection and programs online.

Conventional lines of demarcation are being contested, and we are moving beyond art histories that neatly define artistic schools and periods to enable a richer, broader, and more profound understanding of cultural dialogue. Increasingly, the fluidity of boundaries is recognized, and juxtapositions that might once have been thought of as untenable now face close scrutiny for what they reveal about art, its process, and communicative agency. This is an ongoing dialectic from which questions emerge. How have global currents in art history shaped the creation of The Met, and, in turn, how has the Museum itself shaped the study of art and culture? How has The Met's understanding of and approach to art changed throughout its history, and how have these definitions affected and informed acquisition criteria and approaches to scholarship? This issue of the *Journal* provides an opportunity to probe the shifting perspectives on so-called encyclopedic museums.

The scholarship underpinning critical discourse that is central to our identity as an institution has long been represented in the *Journal*. Since it was founded in 1968, the *Journal* has provided the opportunity to publish original research on the history, interpretation, conservation, and scientific examination of works of art in the Museum's collection. The essays in this issue reflect the breadth of the collection and the myriad questions it invokes. The first six essays present a critical look at how The Met formed its identity as a cultural institution throughout its 150 years. Joanne Pillsbury, Andrall E. Pearson Curator in the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, considers the shifting definitions within the Museum through its collecting practices of what is considered "fine art"

in relation to the arts of the Indigenous Americas. Focusing on the “Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections” exhibition held at The Met in 1984–85, Maia Nuku (Ngai Tai), Evelyn A. J. Hall and John A. Friede Associate Curator for Oceanic Art, recognizes the unprecedented collaboration between Māori tribal authorities and the Museum that has evolved into an international standard of practice for museums stewarding this sacred material. Tommaso Mozzati, Researcher, Università degli Studi di Perugia, traces the complex journey of The Met’s sixteenth-century Vélez Blanco patio from Spain to New York, and examines the role it played in U.S.–Cuba political and cultural relations during the 1950s. Yelena Rakic, Curator in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, explores the early history and display of The Met’s collection of ancient Near Eastern art that reflects a growing U.S. interest in the material culture of the Middle East. Focusing on a mid-eighteenth-century Sèvres porcelain garniture, Iris Moon, Assistant Curator in the Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, moves beyond its provenance to engage with issues of dispersal and dispossession to reveal history as a dialectical process that has implications for how objects can be understood today. Rebecca Capua, Associate Conservator in the Department of Paper Conservation, examines the history of facsimiles in museum collections as reflecting the changing and complex role of conservation.

Continuing the scholarly tradition of exploring The Met’s collection, the volume also includes articles elucidating a portable Byzantine micromosaic icon of the *Virgin Eleousa*, by Maria Harvey, Rome Fellow 2020–21 at The British School at Rome; a seventeenth-

century Ethiopian Orthodox Christian prayer book, by Kristen Windmuller-Luna, Curator of African Art, The Cleveland Museum of Art; Philippe Auguste Hennequin’s portrait of Sir Sidney Smith in prison, by Katherine Gazzard, Curator of Art (Post-1800) and Caird Research Fellow, Royal Museums Greenwich, London; the *pâte coulante* frame-making technique favored by artists such as Edgar Degas, by Peter Mallo, Artist, Educator, and Chief of Frame Development and Production, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and a research note exploring two early sixteenth-century gilded silver figurines by Hans von Reutlingen, by Elizabeth Rice Mattison, Andrew W. Mellon Assistant Curator of Academic Programming, Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire.

Whereas this issue of the *Journal* cannot fully address the many aspects of museum practice outlined above, together, the articles represent a range of critical issues pertinent to our collection—its origins, development, and future—encouraging ongoing dialogue that celebrates the diversity of objects and the captivating stories they reveal while affirming the complexity of human endeavor and creativity.

We are most grateful to Assunta Sommella Peluso, Ada Peluso, and Romano I. Peluso for their support of the *Journal* in memory of Ignazio Peluso. We also thank the Samuel H. Kress Foundation for further assisting in honor of The Met’s 150th anniversary.

MAX HOLLEIN

*Marina Kellen French Director
The Metropolitan Museum of Art*

Aztecs in the Empire City: “The People without History” in The Met

JOANNE PILLSBURY

Museums are born of processes that assemble, categorize, and separate objects into collections—actions that are at the heart of institutional identity formation. These processes are informed by cultural and historical events, and changing understandings and belief systems across an array of fields. In turn, museums prompt the shifting of public and academic perceptions of times, places, and peoples. How collections are classified touches on histories of taste and the formation of canons, but also notions of history. Some of the complexities of these processes can be seen through the lens of a specific collecting area—ancient American art—and the ongoing goals and objectives of what has often been referred to as an “encyclopedic” museum.¹



fig. 1 Fragmentary relief, 9th–10th century. Uxmal, Yucatán, Mexico, Mesoamerica. Stone, 6½ × 14½ in. (16.5 × 36.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of A. J. Lespinasse, 1877 (77.8)

The Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded a scant five years after the end of the U.S. Civil War, with nothing more than an idea as its impetus. Unlike the great museums of Europe such as the Louvre and the Prado, which had been created from royal collections, or even Boston’s Museum of Fine Arts, which had built upon the Boston Athenaeum’s holdings, The Met had no collection to begin with, nor any building.² It was an inauspicious start but nonetheless a noble and ambitious one. George Fisk Comfort, a lecturer at Princeton University and one of the founders of the Museum, declared that “a museum of art in a large and wealthy city should illustrate the history of the origin, the rise, the growth, the culminating glory, and the periods of decline and decadence of all the formative arts, both pure and applied, as they have appeared in all lands and in all ages of the world.”³ In all lands and all ages— aspirational words that would be forgotten within a few decades.

As stated in its charter, the Museum was founded to establish and maintain a museum and library of art, and to encourage and develop the study of the fine arts, with the goal of encouraging the “application of arts to manufactures and practical life, of advancing the general knowledge of kindred subjects, and, to that end, of furnishing popular instruction and recreation.”⁴ These educational goals, broadly construed, run parallel with some other museums established about that time. The South Kensington Museum, now the Victoria

and Albert Museum, was established in 1855 to implement the design lessons of the Great Exhibition of 1851, and to make them available to the general public. Philanthropists and cultural leaders believed that art and museums could provide moral uplift to all visitors in the rapidly growing city of New York, regardless of socioeconomic background.⁵

This idea of public instruction, and the inculcation of civilizing values, was considered particularly urgent in New York. In 1870, the year the Museum was founded, fully one-half of the population of the city was born outside the United States.⁶ Yet, in the first twenty years of the Museum’s existence, very few of these New Yorkers could actually visit the Museum. In the nineteenth century, a six-day workweek was commonplace: only Sundays were free of the burden of labor. The Museum, however, adhered to the tradition of Sabbath laws, which forbade work and various other activities on that day. The subject of Sunday hours was fiercely debated within and beyond the Museum, and finally, in May 1891, the Museum opened on Sunday afternoons for the first time.⁷ As a sidebar, from its beginning, the South Kensington Museum had open hours several evenings a week precisely to address the issue of outreach to those unable to visit the museum during the day.

In 1880, the Museum relocated to its current site at 82nd Street and Fifth Avenue and opened the doors of its new Ruskinian Gothic building. The Met’s

positioning on the edge of Central Park is significant as it linked the institution with other currents of improvement in the city. One explicit purpose of Central Park was to bring the morally edifying and health-enhancing benefits of nature to those who could not afford an escape to the country, and the Museum was part of this civic initiative to instruct and improve. The vastly increased wealth in the hands of the economic elite was translated into rapidly expanding art collections, both private and public. Such aggrandizing ambitions were mirrored by The Met, and it built the first of its many expansions in 1888.

The growth of the Museum reflected a broader movement to foster a distinctively American culture in art, landscape design, and architecture, and while it was inevitably tied to Europe, it also looked to many other parts of the world for inspiration. The Met, in the eyes of many, was an essential project for what was, comparatively, still a young nation with an inchoate identity. Moreover, a newly emergent hemispheric view, one that specifically embraced Latin America, became part of the cultural seedbed that nurtured the foundation and expansion of the Museum. This embrace must be considered within the context of commercial and territorial ambitions in the hemisphere, and thus fraught with questions about colonialism and imperialism.⁸ It remains critical to try to comprehend the intentions of those developing these institutions, and what they hoped to achieve.

The last quarter of the nineteenth century was a high-water mark for public interest in American antiquity. The excitement was fueled in part by the best-selling volumes of John Lloyd Stephens and illustrator Frederick Catherwood (1841, 1843), the first popular books to focus on the ancient Maya civilization, but also William H. Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico*, published in 1843.⁹ New York was home to the Broadway Panorama, also known as the Catherwood

Panorama, a venue for exhibiting objects Stephens collected on earlier visits to Central America and the Yucatán Peninsula along with Catherwood's paintings of Jerusalem, Thebes, and Niagara Falls.¹⁰ Such was the fever for an ancient American past by the 1870s that Samuel Foster Haven, librarian of the American Antiquarian Society, declared it an "archaeological epidemic."¹¹ Entertainments and commercial enterprises such as the "Aztec Fair" featured collections of Mexican antiquities,¹² as did fine arts exhibitions, including the 1883 Pedestal Fund Art Loan Exhibition at the National Academy of Design.¹³

Collecting was partially fueled by expanding U.S. commercial interests in Mexico in the 1880s and 1890s. During the regime of Porfirio Díaz (1876–1911), Mexico experienced a period of rapid economic growth under a government hospitable to foreign investment in order to modernize and expand the railroads and other infrastructure projects. The extensive construction, and the businesses that grew in their wake, led to the discovery of more archaeological sites. The railroads also facilitated the transport of objects within and beyond the country, feeding a rising demand from museums in Mexico City, Europe, and the United States.¹⁴

The first gifts of ancient American art were presented to The Met within three years of its founding. Acquisitions in the first decades arrived via various channels, including missionaries, but many came as gifts from diplomats, or purchased from their collections. Particularly in the second half of the nineteenth century, foreign missions in Latin America were crucial players in the shipment of antiquities outside the country, and often took advantage of diplomatic immunity for shipments.¹⁵ The earliest Precolumbian acquisition still in the collection, a sculpted stone from the facade of the House of the Governor at Uxmal (figs. 1, 2), was presented by the U.S. consul in Mérida, Mexico, A. J. Lespinasse, in 1877. Mérida at the time was becoming a

fig. 2 John Lloyd Stephens (American, 1805–1852) (author) and Frederick Catherwood (British, 1799–1854) (engraver). Casa del Gobernador, Uxmal, 1843. Rare Book Division, The New York Public Library. "Casa del gobernador, Uxmal," New York Public Library Digital Collections. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47db-1209-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>



collecting point, and Lespinasse was but one of a number of diplomats extracting antiquities from Uxmal and other spectacular Maya sites of the Yucatán Peninsula.¹⁶

The stone, carved in deep relief, features three circular shapes within an upside-down U-shaped form terminating in volutes with loops on either side, above a trapezoidal element. On the reverse, a long, tapered tenon would have facilitated attachment to the facade of the building. Although we know now that the stone was once a component of a monumental mosaic “mask,” an anthropomorphic portrait of a mountain deity, or *witz* in Mayan,¹⁷ at the time, little was known about Maya iconography, and the complex forms were the subject of considerable debate. Augustus Le Plongeon, for example, argued that the Yucatán Peninsula was the cradle of civilization, and that sites there predated those of ancient Egypt.¹⁸

The Met’s early acquisitions of ancient American art reveal what can be described, somewhat generously, as a nascent understanding of the field of American archaeology, and an abiding interest in origins, forging connections with other ancient traditions elsewhere on the globe. The correspondence around the Lespinasse gift illuminates how people were trying to categorize and understand an American antiquity, and where to place it within a larger worldview.¹⁹ The consul, for example, compared Maya glyphs to Egyptian hieroglyphs. For many, the ancient Americas were a tabula rasa on which

to project what are now considered outlandish ideas. Mid-nineteenth-century writers such as Thomas Ewbank, a founder of the American Ethnological Society, summed up the prevailing view: “Here is one half of the planet without a page of written record, without legends or traditions.”²⁰ Essential questions about the civilizations of the ancient Americas still lingered late into the century: How did these people get here, and how do they relate to other ancient global traditions?

Although to a lesser degree, antiquities from the territorial United States also came into the Museum in its first decade, including Mississippian pottery acquired by the financier and philanthropist Henry Gurdon Marquand (fig. 3). The Met’s 1880 Annual Report records the gift of some eighty objects that Marquand had previously exhibited in his home in Newport, Rhode Island.²¹ The report notes, “such relics are very important to the Museum, as in the future one of its features should be a collection of the ancient arts of the Americas.”²² Marquand continued to support this effort, funding the purchase of ancient Peruvian ceramics from the collection of Richard Gibbs, U.S. envoy to Peru.²³ Echoing his fellow diplomat Lespinasse and his search for an Egyptian connection, Gibbs was particularly interested in demonstrating a link between ancient Peruvians and Asia. First and foremost, however, Precolumbian objects were embraced as part of a continental heritage: indigenous antiquities, be they



fig. 3 View of ancient Peruvian and Mississippian ceramics, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gallery 29, Wing C, 2nd floor, 1907



fig. 4 Eagle relief, 10th–13th century. Mexico, Toltec. Andesite or dacite, paint. H. $24\frac{1}{2}$ × W. $30\frac{1}{2}$ × D. $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. (62.2 × 77.5 × 6.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Frederic E. Church, 1893 (93.27.2)

from Mexico or South America, were fully American.²⁴ They were a component of a new hemispheric identity, one that made a conscious separation from Europe as the United States gained prominence as a global power.

Enthusiasm for developing the ancient American collection gained momentum, to the point that in 1882, John Taylor Johnston, president of The Met, and Luigi Palma di Cesnola, the Museum's first director, declared that "the antiquities of our own continent should form a prominent feature in an American Museum, and we are charged with a special duty to make here a Museum of

old American art for the study of American scholars as well as scholars from abroad." They asked the Trustees to establish "a department of old American art."²⁵

What is striking here is that this discussion was occurring in the context of a dedicated art museum. Other museums and learned societies in Latin America, Europe, and the United States had been acquiring American antiquities since at least the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Some of these institutions inherited former royal collections, often encompassing a range of objects from paintings to natural history

fig. 5 Kneeling female figure, 15th–early 16th century. Mexico, Mesoamerica, Aztec. Stone, pigment. H. 21½ × W. 10½ × D. 9¾ in. (54.6 × 26.7 × 24.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum Purchase, 1900 (00.5.16)

specimens, and would later break apart into separate entities.²⁶ Berlin, for example, created a dedicated ethnographic museum in 1868, the *Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde* (now the *Ethnologisches Museum of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*), where American antiquities were held. The *Musée du Louvre*, however, was a notable, if short-lived, exception to the rule that Precolumbian works were usually shown in general history or natural history museums. In 1850, Adrien de Longpérier, an antiquarian, organized the first Americanist exhibition in an art museum in Paris: some nine hundred works from civilizations “wholly unknown and of a highly peculiar character.”²⁷ Yet, as Alice Conklin

has noted, in the end, the Louvre’s curators could not decide whether or not these were works of art, and they were taken off view in the following decades. By the late 1870s, “*Ars Americana* became *ethnografica*, of interest not for aesthetic qualities but their value as vestiges of extinct ‘primitive’ civilizations and races.”²⁸

Johnston and Cesnola remained firm in their conviction that American antiquities were best understood on aesthetic grounds. The functional nature of many of the works was seen as a complement to their status as fine art: “in gold and other metals, in stone, in textile fabrics and in pottery, are found works which sufficiently indicate the possession by ancient Americans of many useful arts, and a cultivation of the love of beauty, measured by an independent standard which, however distinct from ours, nevertheless proves the presence of intellectual and art loving races of men.”²⁹ This opinion was shared by others, including the Hudson River School painter Frederic E. Church, one of four practicing artists on the first Board of Trustees of the Museum, and an advocate for the creation of a department of what he called “New World Antiquities.” The Met was one of the first art museums—if not *the* first—in the country to collect ancient American art for aesthetic reasons.

That said, The Met’s collection of American antiquities was admittedly small, at least until the early 1890s, when Church became more actively involved. Church was one of several admirers of Mexican antiquities in New York, and he donated a fine pair of Toltec panels depicting an eagle grasping a trilobed object to the Museum in 1893 (fig. 4).³⁰ Church had traveled widely in Latin America, and, beginning in 1881, visited Mexico some fourteen times, primarily for his health, amassing a large, if uneven, assemblage of Mexican antiquities as well as colonial art and contemporary decorative arts.³¹ Church was also an advocate for the acquisition of the Petich Collection, some 1,600 Precolumbian works from Mexico gathered by an Italian diplomat, Luigi (Louis) Petich.³² Primarily stone and ceramic sculptures, they were all identified as “Aztec” or “Toltec” at the time, the most recent cultures to flourish in central Mexico before European colonization in the sixteenth century.³³ This identification reflected the shallow understanding of Mesoamerican history, and the lack of recognition of regional traditions outside central Mexico. It is a reminder that our knowledge of this material has been acquired slowly over the course of decades. Highly variable in quality, the collection included fine Aztec sculptures, such as a kneeling female figure (fig. 5), as well as a number of elegantly carved works from Veracruz.³⁴





fig. 6 The Petich Collection installed at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gallery 29, Wing C, 2nd floor, 1907. The Aztec kneeling female figure (fig. 5) is at left (center of the lower shelf); the Remojadas heads are on the far right.



fig. 7 Mexican and Central American Hall, American Museum of Natural History, ca. 1910. American Museum of Natural History, New York (Image 33037)

First on view in the Museum as a loan, the Petich Collection was displayed in wood and glass cases along the gallery walls, with table cases in the center of the room, and one larger work, a feathered serpent head from Teotihuacan, on a pedestal encircled by a wrought iron bench (fig. 6). The installation reflects a nineteenth-century interest in taxonomies, especially in the presentation of dozens of Remojadas ceramic heads, fragments of complete figures. Petich, who had served as Italy's consul in Mexico from 1888 to 1890, among other postings, was something of a chancer, and the collection's journey to the Museum's permanent holdings was anything but smooth, causing Cesnola to declare that the Petich affair caused him more "trouble and annoyance than the whole Museum put together."³⁵ The collection was ultimately purchased by the Museum in 1900, vastly increasing the institution's holdings of ancient American art to more than two thousand items.³⁶

The Met's interest in Precolumbian art waxed and waned over the course of its history, however. Despite a precocious beginning, acquisitions in this area slowed considerably after 1900, and The Met began to reconsider the place of Precolumbian art within a fine arts museum. Richard Morris Hunt's expansion in 1904 reoriented the building to Fifth Avenue, presenting a grand Beaux-Arts facade to the rapidly expanding city, and the institution's character itself shifted, from one primarily about instruction and edification, to one that increasingly saw itself as an arbiter of taste, aligned with the newly emergent discipline of art history. Along with this architectural reorientation came a reassessment of the Museum's collection and future directions. The Museum began to question whether it was appropriate to show American antiquities in the context of an art museum.

By this time, The Met had lost some of its most enthusiastic supporters of ancient American art. Church had died in 1900, and no one else on the board demonstrated much interest in this area. The Met's first director, Cesnola, who had at least a modest regard for American antiquities, died in 1904 and was replaced by Sir Caspar Purdon Clarke. A far greater impact on the issue, however, was felt when Edward Robinson, formerly a curator of classical antiquities and director of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, joined The Met in 1906, and became director in 1910. Robinson was a committed believer in the centrality and superiority of the classically based European artistic tradition over all others, and these views were widely held by others in the Museum and beyond. The institution was increasingly a player in a theoretically and professionally evolving art historical world—one firmly anchored to Europe.

Robinson himself devoted little attention to Latin America and was content to leave the field of American archaeology to the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH), The Met's sibling on the other side of Central Park, and its staff of trained Americanist archaeological curators. The Mexican and Central American Hall, recently opened at the AMNH, was enlivened with large-scale casts of Mesoamerican monuments (fig. 7), and the Department of Anthropology maintained an active archaeological fieldwork program.³⁷ As far as Robinson was concerned, The Met should focus on building its collection of Greek, Roman, and especially Egyptian antiquities. In 1906, the Museum initiated archaeological fieldwork in Egypt, and excavations continued there for decades, along with other field projects in the Middle East.³⁸



fig. 8 Face beaker with pumas and snakes, 12th–15th century. Peru, Lima province(?), Inca. Gold, H. 6½ in. (16.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Charles W. Gould, 1928 (28.128)

At the time, Robinson’s dim view of American antiquities was widely shared at The Met, an institution that took pride in its growing collection of European masterpieces that embodied its aesthetic discernment.

This aesthetic discernment notably extended to Asian art, a field embraced by fine arts museums in Europe, and a burgeoning collecting area for The Met. As the Museum redefined its priorities under Robinson, the institution’s early enthusiasm for American antiquity faded away. Letters from about 1910 between Robert W. de Forest, then The Met’s secretary and vice president, and Henry Fairfield Osborn Sr., a paleontologist and director of the AMNH, betray an increasing unease on the part of The Met with the ancient American collection. In a 1911 letter to de Forest, Osborn wrote, “our lines of demarcation are perfectly clear: historic peoples belong to the Metropolitan

Museum; prehistoric peoples and prehistoric and primitive works of art may well come here, to Natural History.”³⁹ Osborn was a eugenicist, a believer in the idea of “breeding out” undesirable characteristics in human populations.⁴⁰ The field of eugenics gained momentum in the United States in the first decades of the twentieth century, due in part to accelerating interest in Gregor Mendel’s work on hybridization and heredity, referred to today as genetics, but also amid a backlash against immigration. Eugenics forwarded the concept that certain people, and groups of people, were genetically inferior, giving rise to “scientific” racism that, in turn, led to entrenched institutional classifications.⁴¹

Such now debunked belief systems are components of the uncomfortable histories of museums, and even seemingly honorable actions are clouded by what we recognize today as sinister and utterly unfounded worldviews. One Met acquisition, a gold beaker made about the time of the rise of the Inca Empire in the fifteenth century, is a case in point. Badly crushed now, the result of centuries of burial, the vessel, featuring two faces, puma heads, and serpents, would have been filled with maize beer in convivial, community-building gatherings in antiquity (fig. 8). The beaker had been found on a farm near Lima, Peru, and it was sent by “the orphans of Lima” to the *New York Herald* to be auctioned for the benefit of those left fatherless and motherless by the great Galveston storm of 1900—the single deadliest natural disaster in U.S. history. Shown at The Met from December 1900 to February 1901, it was purchased by an anonymous donor and eventually given to the Museum, where it was cared for by the Department of Decorative Arts. The donor was Charles W. Gould, author of *America: A Family Matter*, a 1922 volume that advocated for the maintenance of “racial purity” and the inherent supremacy of the “Nordic races.”⁴²

The idea of a European cultural superiority was not a new idea at the beginning of the twentieth century, however, and it permeated a range of fields, including the visual arts. James Stephanoff’s 1845 watercolor *An Assemblage of Works of Art in Sculpture and in Painting, from the Earliest Period to the Time of Phydias* gives form to a hierarchy of the arts of the ancient world (fig. 9). Maya sculptures from Copán, Honduras, and Palenque, Mexico, are at the base, placed on either side of a group of Indian Hindu and Buddhist sculptures that are flanked, in turn, by Burmese Buddhas. Above them are Assyrian reliefs, Egyptian works, the pediment of the Temple of Aphaia from Aegina, and finally, at the top, the figurative pinnacle, the Parthenon marbles. The



fig. 9 James Stephanoff (British, 1786–1874). *An Assemblage of Works of Art in Sculpture and in Painting, from the Earliest Period to the Time of Phydias*, 1845. Watercolor over graphite, 29¼ × 24½ in. (74.3 × 62.2 cm). British Museum, London (1994, 1210.6)

watercolor was based on works in the British Museum, London, as well as others that museum hoped to acquire, so while ancient American works were considered worthy of the institution, relative values were clearly expressed.⁴³ In the ensuing decades, in the wake of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859), Stephanoff's watercolor, a local image prepared for a local audience, was superseded by a more widespread belief in the relative superiority or inferiority of individuals and populations and their artistic achievements based on evolutionary models. Adopted with alacrity by many anthropologists in the late nineteenth century, global history was soon regarded as an evolutionary progression from savagery to civilization, and the beliefs held sway in New York and its institutions for some time. As late as 1936, a potential donor offered a selection of Chinese paintings to the AMNH; the museum declined, noting, "the field of the Department of Anthropology does not extend to the art of the more developed civilizations."⁴⁴

The discussions surrounding the proper setting for the arts of the ancient Americas reveal multiple factors. For example, the minutes of The Met's Board of Trustees meeting in December 1913 record that the Museum was unable to exhibit the "Mexican sculptures and early American pottery" by reason of lack of space, a rationale for sending most of the collection across the park to the AMNH the next year. As noted above, Robinson, who was director of The Met from 1910 to 1931, was a classical archaeologist and a believer in the superiority of the classically based European artistic tradition over all others.⁴⁵ The ancient American collection, to his mind, did not belong in an art museum, and lack of space was an excuse to remove it. Robinson, the first true professional art historian to lead the Museum, studied in Berlin, where works related to ethnography, including American antiquities, were emphatically separated and placed in their own museum. Robinson's beliefs were widely shared in an evolving Western art historical world.

The Met grew in a complex and tangled way with the very discipline of art history—a comparatively young field whose first professional body, the College Art Association, was established only in 1911. The Met was quickly becoming an institution that prided itself in a growing collection of masterpieces and an overall discernment in the fine arts. The absence of artists' names, and the functional nature of many of the Precolumbian works, surely also mitigated against an embrace of the works as fine art. By this time, the idea of "art for art's sake"—that art was self-sufficient and independent of any demeaning utilitarian purpose—had taken firm hold within the discipline, and ceramic vessels by unknown makers fell outside the canon. One might argue that the same could be said of other collecting areas such as ancient Near Eastern or Greek and Roman, but these fields stood in a distinct relationship with the history of art as it was then construed. As Yelena Rakic shows in this volume, while ancient Near Eastern suffered from similar prejudices, it was still seen as a precursor along an evolutionary road through Egyptian, Greek, and Roman—the foundations of Western art. Furthermore, an enduring engagement with the well-respected subject of Biblical archaeology kept ancient Near Eastern relevant to contemporary New Yorkers. As for Greek and Roman, some sculptors' names had been known since antiquity, and the study of the authorship of signed and unsigned Greek vases was gaining momentum.

The idea of an ancient American creator as an artist, on the other hand, was relatively new, and possessed only a flickering presence in popular imagination.

John Lloyd Stephens's publications of the mid-nineteenth century were the first widely read works that explicitly referred to the sculptors of the magnificent stelae at Copán, bestowing artistic agency on indigenous artists. The concept gained currency later in the century when the American painter George de Forest Brush, a pupil of Jean-Léon Gérôme, created a series of paintings featuring ancient Americans as artists engaged in creating and evaluating works of art. Canvases such as *An Aztec Sculptor* (fig. 10) and *The Sculptor and the King* (1888; Portland Art Museum, Oregon), both likely based on Catherwood engravings published by Stephens in 1841, place the artist at the center of the composition.⁴⁶ In *An Aztec Sculptor*, Brush depicts an artist at work on a bas-relief, based loosely on panels from the Temple of the Cross at the Maya site of Palenque, but with changes in scale and material (stucco to marble). Critics noted the “historical inaccuracies” of the work, including using “Aztec” in the title for a monument created by artists of a culture that flourished seven hundred years earlier and in a different region. By and large, however, *An Aztec Sculptor* was hailed for the artist’s skill in rendering various surfaces, and it was compared to Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema’s paintings of Greek artists. As Angela George has noted, whereas European artists looked to ancient Greece and Rome for artistic origins, Brush turned to Mesoamerica for an indigenous artistic tradition.⁴⁷ Despite these occasional emphatic gestures, ancient American art only truly became a proper subject in American art history in the 1940s, and largely through the efforts of one art historian, George Kubler.⁴⁸

To return to The Met’s about-face in 1914, internal documents imply that there was a tacit agreement that with regard to antiquities The Met would focus on the classical world and Asia, and the AMNH would be responsible for everything else.⁴⁹ The Met’s Department of Far Eastern Art was established in 1915, although, as far as we know, the planned reciprocal exchange of Asian art from the AMNH to The Met never occurred. The important point here is that by the middle of the 1910s, Asian art was canonized at The Met, while the art of ancient Latin America—made by “the people without history”—would have only a spectral presence in the Museum for the next fifty years.

From our perspective today, it is difficult to accept the determination that these were peoples without history, but we must remember that the historical dimensions of Mesoamerican writing were not yet known, and radiocarbon dating was still decades in the future. The historical dates in Mayan inscriptions would not be identified for another fifty years, and the few Mesoamerican manuscripts that survived the priests’ bonfires of the sixteenth century were just beginning to be studied. The rise of influential social-evolutionary anthropologists like Lewis Henry Morgan and his followers such as Adolph Bandelier further robbed the ancient Americas of their civilization. Morgan’s *Ancient Society* (1877) proposed three major stages of development across the span of human existence—savagery, barbarism, and civilization. According to Morgan, for example, the Aztecs were no longer the state-level society described by Prescott—they were stalled in



fig. 10 George de Forest Brush (American, 1855–1941). *An Aztec Sculptor*, 1887. Oil on wood, 12½ × 23¾ in. (31.8 × 58.9 cm). National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Gift (Partial and Promised) of the Ann and Tom Barwick Family Collection (2005.107.1)



fig. 11 Wurts Brothers. Installation view of the exhibition "American Sources of Modern Art (Aztec, Mayan, Incan)," at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, May 8–July 1, 1933. Gelatin silver print, 7 × 9½ in. (17.7 × 24.1 cm). Photographic Archive, the Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York (IN29.1)

mid-barbarism.⁵⁰ At the beginning of the twentieth century, in other words, ancient Americans were defined as eternal, unchanging, and primitive.

This point directs our attention to still other germane issues. During these years, The Met was hardly an early adopter of what we now think of as modern art.⁵¹ Indeed, it is important to bear in mind that the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) was born in part out of frustrations with The Met's obdurate refusal to entertain contemporary art. Later in the century, it would be MoMA, and its neighbor, the Museum of Primitive Art, that would mount important exhibitions of Precolumbian art in New York such as "American Sources of Modern Art (Aztec, Mayan, Incan)" in 1933 (fig. 11), which included works from The Met's collection, and the landmark "Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art" in 1940.⁵²

Moreover, the embrace by artists and connoisseurs of the term "primitive" to describe the arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas at that time—the three areas were often lumped together with little distinction—surely did not help Precolumbian art's position at The Met. Not only did the institution's aforementioned distancing from avant-garde art necessitate a rejection of one of the movement's creative wellsprings, but also, the term itself was at odds with The Met's emerging sense of aesthetic discernment embodied in its growing collection of European and Asian masterpieces. By contrast, the major institutional and individual collections assembled throughout these decades were primarily associated with anthropological research. Archaeology, ascendant by the mid-nineteenth century, was, by the end of the century, increasingly seen

through the lens of science rather than the humanities. American and British universities were establishing anthropology departments from the 1890s onward, and archaeology was firmly, if not completely, located within that domain. American antiquities became artifacts of science, and increasingly they were shown in contexts appropriate to that classification. George Gustav Heye's massive collection of Native American art (including antiquities), for example, was first exhibited in 1910 at the Free Museum of Science and Art in Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology).⁵³ The sheer scale of Heye's collection, some thirty thousand items acquired by 1906, now cared for by the National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, may have scared The Met away from the field. The growing professionalization of archaeology, and its scientific affiliation, may have been another factor weighing against The Met's brief consideration of these objects as fine art.

Thinking more internationally, there may have been still other factors. The revolution in Mexico (1910–20) shifted U.S.–Mexican relations in that era. Moreover, the extent to which the United States began to envision itself as a global actor rather than a hemispheric one throughout these decades may also have played a role in realigning The Met's vision of its collecting commitments. What is certain is that this decision in 1914 was overdetermined.

The Met's move was strikingly at odds with broader currents in the United States at the time. The completion of the Panama Canal in 1914 led to celebratory world's fairs, including the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco and the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego.⁵⁴ While The Met remained quiet in the field of ancient American art for decades, other institutions, such as the Brooklyn Museum, Philadelphia Museum of Art, and even the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, were doubling down on Precolumbian art.⁵⁵ The rise of Maya revival architecture in California in the late 1920s and 1930s also suggests attention to the aesthetics of the ancient Americas.⁵⁶ This is not to say that over the years there were not efforts to reignite an interest in Precolumbian art at The Met—Nelson A. Rockefeller, for example, became a trustee of the Museum in 1930, and periodically lobbied for a return to the field.⁵⁷ The Met's position on Precolumbian art, in other words, must be seen within a complicated and layered cultural context that was anything but monolithic.

The 1914 transfer of the Precolumbian collection to the AMNH coincided with The Met's commitment to

the study and presentation of original works of art, especially those that could be attributed to master craftsmen.⁵⁸ Casts, a prominent feature of many museums, including The Met in earlier decades, were taken off view. The relocation of ancient American works to the AMNH also signaled a redefinition of what constituted “American art,” and an enshrinement of a more Anglo-Saxon and Dutch identity, particularly in the wake of a continued influx of immigrants to New York. The idea of “American art for an American museum” persisted, but in a more circumscribed manner.⁵⁹ The shift of Precolumbian works to the AMNH occurred a scant decade before The Met opened its Colonial Revival period rooms, a move that presented a new, selective approach to an American past.

The 1914 transfer of ancient American objects across Central Park was not comprehensive, however, and was limited initially to works in ceramic and stone. The Trustees decided to hold back the ancient Peruvian works in gold and silver at least until 1935, when they, too, were loaned, this time to the Brooklyn Museum.⁶⁰ Ancient Peruvian textiles, which The Met began to collect as early as 1882, not only remained in the Museum, but continued to be collected more or less without pause. Sir Caspar Purdon Clarke, Cesnola’s replacement, was formerly director of the South Kensington Museum, and a firm believer that museums could positively influence industrial design. The garment business was New York’s largest industry by far, and made up a third of the adult workforce, mostly immigrants.⁶¹ As John Ruskin had argued decades earlier, the study of the decorative arts would lead to better design in factories and workshops, and this desire to teach and inspire resulted in the creation of The Met’s Textile Study Room in 1910. The collector and trustee George D. Pratt became a major benefactor in this area, and an exhibition in 1930 celebrated a number of the ancient Peruvian textiles he gave to the Museum. Acquisitions slowed down considerably after Pratt’s death in 1935, however, but strikingly, even in the absence of a specialist curator, ancient Peruvian textiles were acquired by the Museum. John Phillips, a curator in the Department of Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Art, for example, recommended the purchase of eight fine examples in 1959. Perhaps signaling a changing attitude at the Museum, Phillips noted, “[in] our day, when highly conventionalized forms have become familiar through the agency of contemporary painting and sculpture, these textiles seem far less *outré* than they once did.”⁶²

By 1952, internal correspondence in Met files indicates that there was an acknowledgment that the

Precolumbian collection should not have been withdrawn to the AMNH, and The Met began a somewhat desultory return to the field. Francis Henry Taylor, then director of the Museum, addressed the Board of Trustees that year, noting that many members were anxious to reenter the field, “not only because they believe that it is one of the important areas of the history of art with which an encyclopedic museum like the Metropolitan should concern itself, but also because of the growing interest and awareness of the history and archaeology of the Western Hemisphere.”⁶³ The rising prominence of the Robert Woods Bliss collection, shown at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, from 1947 to 1962, surely contributed to the sense of a missed opportunity, as did the various exhibitions at MoMA and the Museum of Primitive Art (after 1957).⁶⁴

Except for the textile collection and Precolumbian musical instruments, there were only a handful of ancient American objects still in the building in the 1950s, and they were under the nominal care of The American Wing. Dudley Easby Jr., a former assistant general counsel to Nelson A. Rockefeller while he was the coordinator of inter-American affairs, joined The Met as secretary of the Museum after he completed his service with Rockefeller in 1945. The Office of Inter-American Affairs, as the coordinator’s office came to be known, was an agency outside the Department of State, created by Franklin D. Roosevelt and designed to strengthen hemispheric ties, particularly in the face of incursions of European fascism in Latin America. Cultural diplomacy was a key element of the office’s strategy, including loan exhibitions of Latin American art in the United States.⁶⁵ These projects gave greater visibility to ancient American art, and the postwar period saw an increase in collectors, exhibitions, and overall interest in Latin America and the pre-Hispanic past.⁶⁶ Easby and his wife, Elizabeth, became authorities on ancient American art and major advocates for the field both at and beyond the Museum.⁶⁷

By the mid-1950s, the will to reengage with ancient American art was evident, yet how does an institution start to rebuild a collection at this late date, particularly in an era when Latin American countries were increasingly vigilant over the illegal export of antiquities?⁶⁸ Not surprisingly, the reengagement proceeded in fits and starts. One potential solution was to pursue existing private collections in the United States. For example, in 1949, the Art Institute of Chicago had shown the collection of Walter and Louise Arensberg. Noted collectors of modern, African, and Precolumbian art, the

Arensbergs were searching for an appropriate permanent home for their collection.⁶⁹ With Marcel Duchamp as their go-between, they reached out to Taylor, The Met's director. Taylor was apparently more keen on the Precolumbian sculptures than the modern paintings, and he wrote of his wish to establish a department of Precolumbian art within a few years. Negotiations failed, however, and the collection ended up at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.⁷⁰

The Met eventually reentered the field, although initially somewhat modestly—the Museum took a loan show of ancient Colombian gold in 1954—and occasionally through a conceptual back door. Several works, for example, were returned from the Brooklyn Museum, but not for exhibition in the primary galleries. Instead, they were placed on view in the Junior Museum at The Met, geared toward children.⁷¹ By the 1960s, Precolumbian art was difficult to ignore in New York, especially after a twenty-five-ton Olmec basalt head was installed on a wooden pedestal designed by Philip Johnson in front of Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building in 1965 (fig. 12). Sculpted about 1000 B.C., and officially called San Lorenzo Monument 1, after the site in Veracruz where it was found, the colossal head presided over Park Avenue for seven weeks in conjunction with the World's Fair, instantly becoming the darling of avant-garde artists and critics.⁷² About

this time, Easby, with support from James J. Rorimer, director of the Museum from 1955 to 1966, initiated a more robust return to the field of ancient American art, arranging for the purchase of a select number of major stone monuments, including a Maya storm god, Chahk,⁷³ and a standard-bearer from a temple in Veracruz carved after the Aztec conquest of that region (fig. 13).⁷⁴ By and large, however, the collection was rebuilt through the acquisition of collections, such as Nathan Cummings's ancient Peruvian ceramics, presented to the Museum between 1962 and 1976, and Alice K. Bache's smaller but exquisite collection of works in gold and jade, from 1966 to 1977.⁷⁵

The decisive institutional transformation came with the acquisition of the collection of Nelson A. Rockefeller, and that of the Museum of Primitive Art, the institution he founded in 1954, when The Met had yet to show sustained interest in the art of the ancient Americas, Africa, and Oceania. René d'Harnoncourt, director of MoMA from 1949 to 1967, and a close adviser of Rockefeller's, brokered the deal with The Met to create a new department encompassing the holdings of the Museum of Primitive Art and Rockefeller's personal collection. The agreement was celebrated with an exhibition of a selection of works in 1969. The grouping of the three disparate areas together, commonplace in European and U.S. museums and universities for much

fig. 12 San Lorenzo Monument 1 being installed in front of the Seagram Building, New York, May 18, 1965. Photograph: Eddie Hausner/*The New York Times*

fig. 13 Standard-bearer, 15th–early 16th century, Mexico, Mesoamerica, Veracruz, Aztec. Sandstone. H. 31¹/₁₆ × W. 13⁷/₁₆ × D. 13¹/₁₆ in. (80.5 × 34.1 × 33.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1962 (62.47)





of the twentieth century, was questioned by Robert Goldwater, the Museum of Primitive Art's director, in the exhibition's catalogue: "their [Oceania, Africa, and the Americas] differences—geographical, temporal, functional, and esthetic—so much outweigh their similarities, that if one looks at them individually, one doubtless questions how and why they are related."⁷⁶

Easby became the consultative chairman of the new Department of Primitive Art in 1967; in 1974 the Museum of Primitive Art closed, and its library, staff, and 3,500 works were transferred to The Met. The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, dedicated to the memory of Nelson's son, who lost his life on a collecting expedition to New Guinea, opened to the public in 1982. Philippe de Montebello, then director of The Met, in an echo of the founders' beliefs over a century earlier, proclaimed that

the so-called "primitive arts" are accorded the same prominence and permanence, under one roof, as the arts of Western Europe, the Far East, and the United States. The new installation affirms that all art invested with the power to transcend its locus in time and move us by its formal harmonies has a rightful place in this Museum. At long last, the arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Native Americas have shed their image as ethnography or exotica and speak to us, not through the language of tribal mysteries, but in the universal language of aesthetics and of significant form.⁷⁷

On one level, the saga of ancient American art at The Met may be seen as the story of an institution establishing its identity over the course of a century. On another level, however, this history reflects an epistemological unease, an uncertainty of the place of the ancient Americas in narratives of the history of art. Ancient American art has been cared for by at least half a dozen different departments at The Met. Initially, sculptures were, logically, in the Department of Sculpture. Less logically, the sculptures that remained in The Met after 1914 were cared for by the Department of Renaissance and Post-Renaissance Art—what later became the Department of Renaissance and Modern Art—and then, in the 1920s, they were cared for by the Department of Decorative Arts. From the 1940s until the mid-1960s, Precolumbian collections were part of The American Wing. In 1969, the ancient American collection became part of the Department of Primitive Art, an entity known as the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas from 1991 to 2020, and now known simply as the Michael C. Rockefeller

Wing. If we add in the various divisions that cared for the textiles, the art of the ancient Americas has migrated between six or seven different departments within the institution.

At the heart of this uncertainty is the epistemological question of how we understand Latin America before the arrival of Europeans in the context of world history. This has been a question since the Spanish invasion in the late fifteenth century, and the circumstances of the subsequent conquest have cast a long shadow over how the civilizations of the ancient Americas are viewed. Prior to 1492, Europeans had at least partial glimpses of Africa and Asia, but not the Americas: the encounter with the Americas was wholly unanticipated.⁷⁸ In the fifteenth century, knowledge was based on the Bible, and the classical authors. Yet the Aztecs do not appear in the Bible; the Incas are not accounted for in Pliny. The challenge was to explain their existence and insert them into an established history. The story of ancient American art at The Met is not only one of shifting definitions of what is considered fine art, it is also a question of recognizing the arts of the Indigenous Americas as part of global narratives that have themselves been evolving.

Museums are an acute reminder of the ways in which we try to understand the past, and the sharp distinctions between what is known from historical texts and what is known from the objects themselves. It has become a platitude to say that history is written by the victors, but the official histories of the ancient Americas were written decades after the glittering cities of these cultures had been destroyed and their populations devastated. Many were composed to justify the conquest, to present the indigenous populations of the ancient Americas as benighted, and in desperate need of salvation. These histories continue to cast a surprisingly long shadow onto present-day knowledge of the history of Latin America before the arrival of Europeans. Archaeology and art history are antidotes, or at least a complementary means, by which to view the past. In this sense, how collections are categorized and presented is fundamental not only to how we understand the histories of these regions but also how we see these regions today and into the future.

As noted at the outset, museums are born of processes that gather and organize, and they are also formed by processes that separate and relegate. The history of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's relationships with the art of the ancient Americas is a salutary tale of changing values in changing times, and it is a reminder that we should constantly acknowledge the fragility of our certainty about any moment. The very fact of the existence of changing priorities, of shifting definitions, however, is minatory as well as promising. For museums are living, evolving entities, constantly in a state of flux and in need of reassessment, redirection, and redefinition. We respond to changing cultural understandings—sometimes too slowly, sometimes with prejudice—but we should always be cognizant that an institution such as The Met is an unfinished story.

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NOTES

- 1 On the formation of museums in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see Conn 1998.
- 2 Bayer and Corey 2020.
- 3 [Comfort] 1870, 505.
- 4 Metropolitan Museum 1895, section 1, unpaginated.
- 5 See Trask 2012, *passim*.
- 6 “[Table of] Total and Foreign-born Population New York City, 1790–2000,” New York City Department of City Planning, Population Division, accessed February 18, 2019, https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/data-maps/nyc-population/historical-population/1790-2000_nyc_total_foreign_birth.pdf.
- 7 Bowling 2011.
- 8 The literature on U.S.–Latin American relations in the nineteenth century is abundant. On imperialism and collecting, see especially Manthorne 1989; Hinsley 1993; Evans 2004; Aguirre 2005; Cabañas 2006; and Brittenham n.d. (in press). It should be noted, however, that this area of study is distinct from collecting works from Africa and Oceania in the wake of imperialist expansion to those areas. As Alice Conklin (2013, 103) has noted, the latter was driven in part by a hegemonic impulse to “know” the colonized.
- 9 Stephens 1841 and 1843; Prescott 1843.
- 10 Brittenham n.d. (in press). The Panorama was open from 1838 to 1842, when the building burned to the ground.
- 11 Haven 1877, 8; Manthorne 1989, 92.
- 12 Orrin 1886. See also Upton 2000, 25–26, fig. 21; Aguirre 2005, chap. 4; and George 2011, 129–30, on public spectacles such as the “Aztec Children.”
- 13 National Academy of Design 1883; see also George 2011, 138.
- 14 Boone 1993, *passim*; Florescano 1993; Sellen 2012; Bueno 2016; Achim 2017.
- 15 Hinsley 1993; Aguirre 2005; Sellen 2005.
- 16 Sellen 2005; Sellen and Lowe 2009; Lowe and Sellen 2010.
- 17 Doyle 2014.
- 18 Desmond and Messenger 1988.
- 19 Lespinasse to the [unnamed] director of the “Museum of Art,” February 16, 1878, Office of the Secretary Records, MMA Archives. The consul was clearly unaware of the Broadway Panorama, and describes the stone as the only example of these ruins in the United States.
- 20 Ewbank 1855, 122.
- 21 MMA 79.1–27. Henry Marquand to John Taylor Johnston, October 18, 1879; November 23, 1879, Office of the Secretary Records, MMA Archives.
- 22 Metropolitan Museum 1880, 166.
- 23 MMA 82.1.1–27.
- 24 George 2011.
- 25 Johnston and Cesnola 1882, 242.
- 26 On Mexico’s National Museum, see Achim 2017; on the British Museum, London, see Graham 1993, Moser 2012, and Delbourgo 2017; on France, see Williams 1993 and Conklin 2013; on Germany, see König 2007. As Steven Conn (1998, 87, 89; 2010, 30) has noted, the University of Pennsylvania’s museum, founded in 1887, and opened at its current site as the Free Museum of Science and Art in 1899, presents an unusual example of an institution originally dedicated to science and art.
- 27 Longpérier 1850, 5.
- 28 Conklin 2013, 41.
- 29 Johnston and Cesnola 1882, 242.
- 30 MMA 93.27.1, 2; Pillsbury n.d. (forthcoming).
- 31 Bargellini 1991; Carr 1994, 1:2; Davis 1997; Kasl 2018, 80.
- 32 [Robinson] 1898; Pillsbury n.d. (forthcoming).
- 33 In present-day scholarly usage “Aztec” is generally used in reference to the empire founded on the Triple Alliance, a union formed in 1428 between the three central Mexican city-states of Texcoco, Tlacopan, and Tenochtitlan—the latter the home of the Mexica, a powerful Nahuatl-speaking group.
- 34 For a longer discussion of the Petich Collection, see Pillsbury n.d. (forthcoming).
- 35 Cesnola to Seeger and Guernsey, September 19, 1894, Office of the Secretary Records, MMA Archives. Unbeknownst to the Museum, Petich had taken out two loans against the value of the collection while it was shown at the Museum in the 1890s. Seeger and Guernsey represented the Bank of London and Mexico, one of the two creditors.
- 36 In the late nineteenth century museums in the United States, Europe, and Latin America were building their collections at truly staggering rates. For example, Berlin’s Königliches Museum für Völkerkunde (Royal Museum of Ethnology, now the Ethnologisches Museum of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin) acquired the Wilhelm Gretzer Collection, some 44,000 works, about the same time; see Hoffmann 2017.
- 37 Freed 2012.
- 38 Roehrig 2020. On Robinson and Mexican art, see Kasl 2018.
- 39 Osborn to de Forest, New York, May 17, 1911, American Museum of Natural History—Gifts and Exchanges, Office of the Secretary Records, MMA Archives. I am grateful to Rex Koontz for calling my attention to this letter.
- 40 Henry Fairfield Osborn Papers, box 6, folder 25, Special Collections Library, AMNH.
- 41 Conklin 2013, 146; Parker 2020.
- 42 Gould 1922.
- 43 Aguirre 2005, 91–93.
- 44 George C. Vaillant to I. C. Huang, New York, August 25, 1936, Department of Anthropology Archives, AMNH.
- 45 Trask 2012, 23–25.
- 46 See Anderson et al. 2008; see also George 2011, chap. 4.
- 47 George 2011, 141–46.
- 48 Barnett-Sánchez 1993. The oft-mentioned first dissertation on ancient American art, by Herbert J. Spinden, published in 1913 as *A Study of Maya Art: Its Subject Matter and Historical Development*, was prepared for partial fulfillment of a degree in the Department of Anthropology at Harvard University.
- 49 Elizabeth Easby, “Works of Art in the Pre-Columbian Collection of the MMA,” February 1956, unpublished report, Office of the Secretary Records, MMA Archives.
- 50 Morgan 1877; George 2011, 131–33.
- 51 Trask 2012.
- 52 Cahill 1933; Museum of Modern Art 1940. See also “Rocky Road to Art,” *Newsweek* 68 (July 18, 1966): 90.
- 53 Kidwell 2010.
- 54 For the impact of the fairs on the market, see Hutchinson 2009; see also Berlo 1992.
- 55 Hoobler 2020; Pillsbury and Doutriaux 2012. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, mounted an exhibition of Maya art in 1912, although they, too, moved away from the field shortly thereafter (*Museum of Fine Arts Bulletin* 1912). The William Hayes Fogg Art Museum, in conjunction with Harvard’s Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, mounted an exhibition in 1940 of Precolumbian art (Fogg Art Museum 1940).
- 56 Braun 1993; O’Neil and Miller 2017; Robb 2017; Hoobler 2020.

- 57 Pillsbury 2014. See also Hoobler 2020 on Walter Pach's attempt to interest The Met in the field, as well as parallel battles in Paris.
- 58 Trask 2012, 121.
- 59 Kasl 2018; Trask 2012.
- 60 Edward Robinson to Frederic A. Lucas [AMNH director], New York, April 28, 1914, carbon copy; H. W. Kent to Herbert Winlock, New York, March 1935; both Office of the Secretary Records, MMA Archives. Most of the Brooklyn loans were returned in 1963 (an embossed disk, MMA 86.17, was returned in 1962, as were the Toltec panels).
- 61 Peck and Spira 2020; Trask 2012, chap. 3. See also Tartsinis 2013 on the desire to stimulate a distinctly "American" design idiom.
- 62 Phillips 1960, 104.
- 63 Taylor to the Members of the Board of Trustees, MMA, October 23, 1952, Office of the Secretary Records, MMA Archives.
- 64 Malcom Delacorte, "Interim Report on Status of Metropolitan Museum of Art's Collection of Pre-Columbian Antiquities at the American Museum of Natural History," 1967, Office of the Secretary Records, MMA Archives. In addition to the MoMA exhibitions listed above, a major Peruvian show was mounted there in 1954 (Bennett 1954). See also Hoobler 2020 on other institutions collecting Precolumbian art in the twentieth century.
- 65 Pillsbury and Doutriaux 2012, 14; Pillsbury 2014.
- 66 Sullivan 2018; Hoobler 2020.
- 67 Among other projects, Elizabeth Easby curated The Met's centennial exhibition "Before Cortés" (Easby and Scott 1970).
- 68 On subsoil patrimony in Mexico, see Ferry 2005.
- 69 Walter Arensberg, Los Angeles, to Francis Henry Taylor, New York, March 25, 1950; Francis Henry Taylor, New York, to Walter Arensberg, Los Angeles, March 29, 1950, carbon copy; Francis Henry Taylor, New York, to Marcel Duchamp, April 11, 1950, carbon copy; all Arensberg, Mr. and Mrs. Walter C., 1949–, Office of the Secretary Records, MMA Archives. See also Walter Arensberg, Los Angeles, to Marcel Duchamp, April 8, 1950, Arensberg Archives I, subseries A, General Correspondence, box 6, folder 32 (Dickinson–Dyhrenfurth), Library and Archives, Philadelphia Museum of Art. I am grateful to Ellen Hoobler for calling my attention to this letter.
- 70 Nelson, Sherman, and Hoobler 2020.
- 71 Museo del Oro 1954. Two small Chiriquí frog pendants in The Met's collection, 91.37.39 and 91.1.1161, acquired in the late nineteenth century, were reproduced for sale at the time. The Toltec panels presented by Frederic E. Church (MMA 93.27.1 and MMA 93.27.2) were shown in the Junior Museum in the exhibition "Archaeology—Exploring the Past" (September 23, 1962–July 4, 1966). The pace increased later in the 1960s, including loan exhibitions such as "Maya Art from Guatemala" (1968).
- 72 Castañeda 2013. See also Sawyer 1968 on the Guggenheim's exhibition of ancient Peruvian ceramics a few years later.
- 73 MMA 66.181.
- 74 Easby 1962; Jones and Vogel 1975. The Museum is guided by the Report of the Association of Art Museum Directors' Task Force on the Acquisition of Archaeological Materials and Ancient Art (revised 2013) and the American Association of Museums' Standards Regarding Archaeological Material and Ancient Art; see Metropolitan Museum 2021, 8–9. Object records provided by the MMA online collection catalogue—an ongoing research project—provide data on the history of works from the time of their creation to their acquisition by the Museum.
- 75 A portion of the Cummings collection, along with twenty loans from the Museo Nacional de Antropología y Arqueología, Lima (now the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú), was shown at The Met in 1964. Installation photographs are available at <https://libmma.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p16028coll14/id/8754>. See also Sawyer 1966.
- 76 Goldwater 1969, unpaginated. It was a concern echoed by others, including William Rubin, curator of the controversial "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern" exhibition at MoMA (1984), who felt that Precolumbian "court styles" such as Aztec should be grouped with "Egyptian, Javanese, [and] Persian" art, overlooking the fact that "court styles" were also present in Africa; Rubin 1984, 3.
- 77 De Montebello 1982, 8.
- 78 Grafton, Shelford, and Siraisi 2002.

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“Te Maori”: New Precedents for Indigenous Art at The Met

MAIA NUKU (NGAI TAI)

Ko te manu e kai ana i te miro nōnā te ngahere
Ko te manu e kai ana i te mātauranga nōnā te ao

The bird who consumes the miro berry understands the forest
But the bird who feasts on knowledge understands the entire world

On September 10, 1984, a group of distinguished Māori gathered at dawn outside The Metropolitan Museum of Art and prepared to carry out ritual protocols for the opening of a new art exhibition. The group of Māori elders had accompanied 174 ancestral *taonga* (cultural treasures) on their first journey away from the shores of New Zealand to the United States. With the traffic stopped on Fifth Avenue, the *karanga* (call) of the women pierced the air and the group began to move forward toward the museum, the men chanting steadily. Dressed in the prestigious finery of flax and feather cloaks, the delegation of senior Māori leaders ascended the front steps of the Museum, where they were joined by the Museum’s director, Philippe de Montebello, the mayor of New York, city officials, sponsors, and invited guests (fig. 1).

fig. 1 Opening protocols for “Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections,” beginning at dawn on September 10, 1984.

Tohunga (ritual expert) Henare Tuwhangai (fourth from right, wearing feather cloak) completes the first cycle of chants and prepares to hand over to *tohunga* Sonny Waru (third from right, also in cloak) for the second phase of chants to accompany the delegation as they proceed up the front steps to the main entrance of The Met.



fig. 2 Kara Puketapu (center, in front) stands with the delegation of *kaumātua* (senior Māori leaders) in the exhibition galleries.



Two young Māori men advanced ahead of the party, acting as sentries (*manutaki*) to ensure the orderly progress of the large group. Expertly wielding their wooden staffs (*taiaha*) to flank the distinguished group of Māori orators, they proceeded up the central staircase of The Met toward the exhibition halls. Guiding the delegation into the galleries, the delivery of chants and incantations in Māori rose to a crescendo as the

group encountered the powerful gathering of ancestral sculptures assembled within (fig. 2). They halted in front of Uenukutuwhatu, the impressive Tainui sculpture (fig. 4) that had been given final approval to travel to New York by the Māori queen, Te Arikinui Dame Te Atairangikāhu, only weeks before.¹

“Te Maori: Maori Art from New Zealand Collections” (Metropolitan Museum of Art, September

fig. 3 Detail from the gateway to Pukeroa Pā on the cover of Mead 1984

1984–January 1985) was a landmark exhibition that set important precedents in terms of consultation and shared decision-making between indigenous communities and museums. An extensive dialogue with *iwi* Māori (tribal authorities) had been established from the outset at the insistence of the management committee created to oversee the project. The engagement with Māori was sustained throughout the planning, installation, and duration of the exhibition, and directly impacted the selection of works and their availability for loan. The installation presented Māori art as art, not artifact, and Māori interlocutors guided interpretive aspects for the duration of the project. Their close and continued involvement directed the representation of Māori people and their culture on an international platform. This collaborative initiative between indigenous Māori authorities and the exhibition's organizers has had far-reaching consequences. The institutional shift it occasioned at The Met continues to have a generative impact on current curatorial practice in the Museum. The model it established—one that favors the participation of indigenous communities in the interpretation and display of their art—has evolved as an international standard of practice for museums with holdings of Māori and Pacific art. The method recast the museum as a critical site for engagement where relationships between communities, museums, and the collections they steward can be negotiated, and invigorated over time.

A LANDMARK EXHIBITION

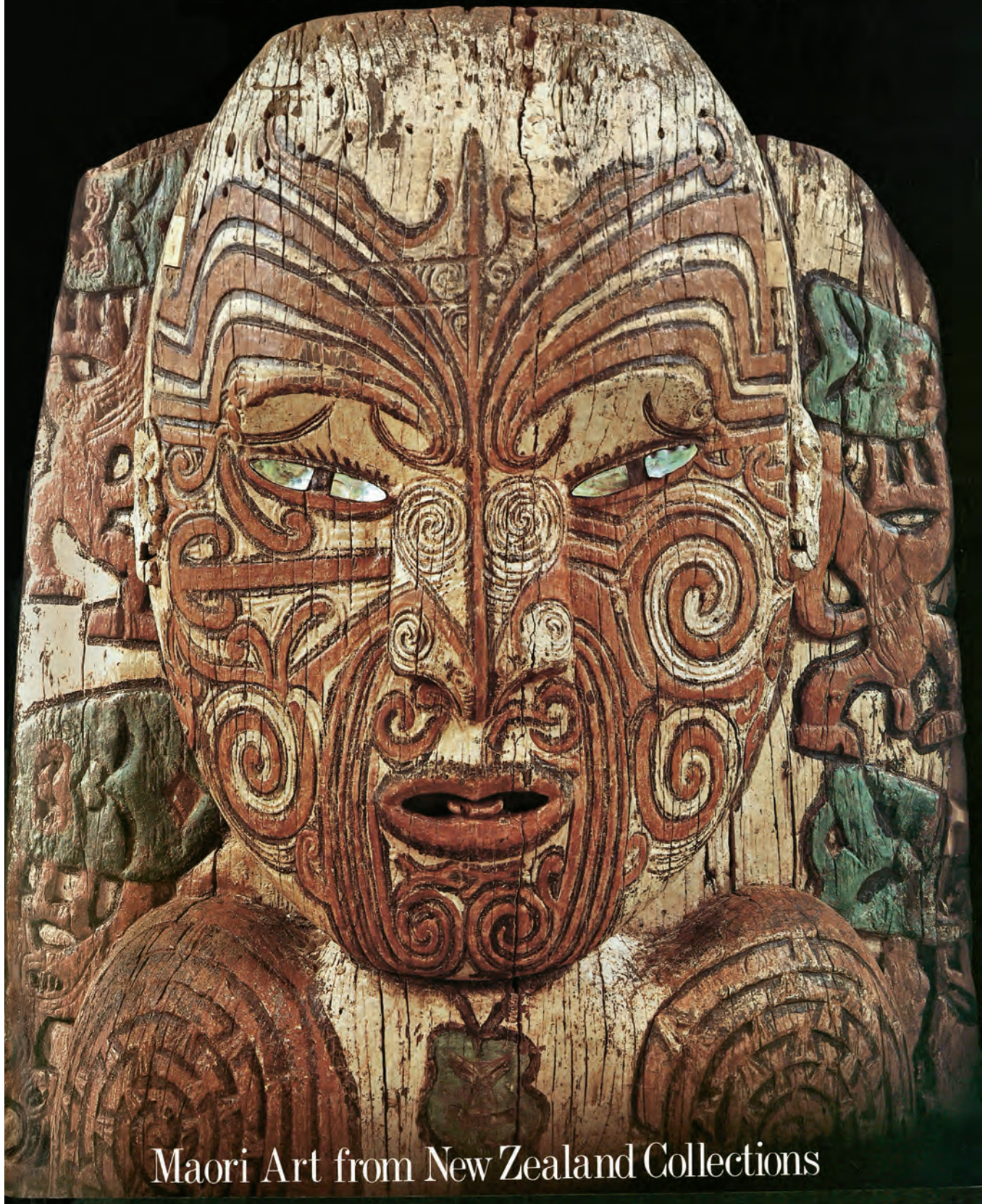
The exhibition (fig. 3) was spearheaded at The Met by Douglas Newton, first chairperson of the newly established Department of Primitive Art (which later became the Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas) in collaboration with the eminent Māori art historian and scholar Hirini Moko Mead as part of an initiative developed by the American Federation of Arts (AFA) with the government of New Zealand. Initial discussions with The Met had begun in the early 1970s when New Zealand's ambassador to the United States, Frank Corner, approached then director Thomas Hoving about the possibility of hosting an exhibition of Māori art. Impressed at the impact of The Met's recent exhibition of Nelson Rockefeller's collection,² which had introduced audiences to the arts of Africa and Oceania, the New Zealand ambassador considered the "effect such a show could have on Maori prestige."³ Discussions were forced to be on hold for several years due to the difficult economic climate brought about by surging prices during the oil crisis of 1973, which halted

governmental ambitions for joint cultural projects. Renewed impetus for an ambitious exhibition of Māori art in the United States followed swiftly on the heels of a spectacular display of Pacific art that Newton organized for the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, in 1979. "The Art of the Pacific Islands" brought together international loans from eighty-three lenders⁴ that were presented in a dramatic installation typical of the sleek modernist displays that Newton and colleagues had pioneered at New York's Museum of Primitive Art (MPA), where Newton had worked as a curator since 1957. The idea gained traction when the director and chairman of New Zealand's Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council, Michael Volkerling and Hamish Keith, respectively, visited Washington, DC, to attend the opening. Buoyed by spectacular displays of Pacific art at the critically acclaimed show at the National Gallery of Art, Volkerling and Keith were keen to build on the momentum by organizing an exhibition that would showcase the best in Māori art from New Zealand's extensive collections and "break the stranglehold New Zealand museums of natural history had had on these great works of art for more than a century."⁵ They contacted the AFA in New York to discuss the scope and complexities of such a project. A conversation ensued with Newton, who had begun to oversee the transfer of the Museum of Primitive Art's collection following Nelson Rockefeller's announcement of his intention to give the museum's holdings and his personal collection to The Met, which was proposed as an ideal venue for the Māori exhibition.⁶

In a letter to the *New Zealand Listener*, Keith described a first meeting of New Zealand and U.S. representatives in December 1979 where it was established that "regardless of the legal ownership or physical possession, no work could be included unless its spiritual owners—the people from whom it came—agreed."⁷ By 1981, a management team was established in Wellington, New Zealand, chaired by New Zealand's secretary of the Department for Māori Affairs, Kara Puketapu (Te Āti Awa). Puketapu recalled: "One of the things . . . made clear from the beginning . . . was that there was not going to be *any* Maori exhibition unless Maori people [were] involved and agree[d]. Now that [was] pretty critical."⁸

Puketapu was joined by other Māori on the committee, including Hirini Moko Mead (Ngāti Awa), professor of Māori studies at Victoria University of Wellington, and Piri Sciascia (Ngāti Kahungunu), executive officer of the Department of Māori Affairs.⁹ Other members included officials from New Zealand's

TE MAORI



Maori Art from New Zealand Collections

fig. 4 Uenuku, a prominent ancestor of the Tainui people, closely associated with the rainbow whose appearance prior to battle was deemed auspicious. Tainui, A.D. 1400. *Tōtara* wood (*Podocarpus totara*), H. 8 ft. 9½ in. (267 cm). Te Awamutu Museum, New Zealand (2056)



fig. 5 The Māori delegation, led here by Henare Tuwhangai and Sir James Henare (in cloaks, from left), guide the party of government and Met museum officials through the exhibition galleries. Senior statesmen are flanked by Jerry Rautangata and Pita Sharples (in foreground), two *manutaki* (armed sentries) who accompanied the group throughout the formal proceedings.

fig. 6 A member of the *tira* (Māori delegation) greets Edward Koch, then mayor of the City of New York, with a *hongi* (customary Māori greeting) at the breakfast reception, held immediately after the opening and signaling the completion of formal protocols.

principal government agencies such as the Department of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Tourism, Trade and Industry; members of the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council; the Maori and South Pacific Arts Council (MASPAC); the Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand (AGMANZ); and a representative from Mobil, the exhibition's main sponsor. Staff from each of New Zealand's major museums were also involved and liaised with Newton at The Met. Complex negotiations ensued among this multitude of constituent parties for the next three years.¹⁰ Despite the logistics of accommodating the

varied interests of such a large and unwieldy group, the balance of power lay with a core team of highly educated Māori whose combined experience in arts organizations and university and government departments supported the realization of a clear and focused agenda.¹¹ For the first time in history, Māori were actively involved in negotiations for an international exhibition of their own art and were playing a lead role in its planning and direction.

The selection of works of art for the exhibition remained in the hands of Newton, who was based in New York but made a series of visits to New Zealand in the early 1980s to review potential candidates for loan. Curators and ethnologists working in institutions across New Zealand shared images and ideas for major works of art they believed should be included, but, it was explained, these were all subject to approval by *iwi* Māori, the tribal authorities for whom they were held in trust. This process of consultation with Māori was a crucial initiative, and regional museums throughout New Zealand outlined their distinct role as custodians of *taonga* (ancestral treasures) on behalf of the Māori communities within their districts. The institutions acknowledged that, alongside any nominal claim to legal ownership of Māori artifacts (what we might determine the "physical" component), full spiritual and cultural custodianship (the "metaphysical" aspect) was vested in a variety of local Māori tribal groups. Complex negotiations with Māori authorities across New Zealand ensued over the course of the next few years. Māori in general were skeptical of museums and were initially suspicious of the motives of curators when proposals for the exhibition were first put forth. Many Māori leaders expressed extreme reluctance to be involved and categorically opposed the idea of their sacred *taonga* being released for travel overseas. Others were aware of the potential strategic advantages in allowing their *taonga* to travel, which they understood would afford an unprecedented opportunity for Māori art to be seen by the whole world.¹² Discussions, often heated, continued for several years until consensus was achieved.¹³ Neither was this extensive consultation merely token. Throughout negotiations, key decisions were taken out of the hands of museum professionals and the decisions of Māori prevailed.

Much debate, for example, surrounded a particularly significant sculpture that curators and several Māori members of the management committee were keen to include in the final selection. Uenukutuwhatu, a unique deity figure, had been early identified as a signature work for the exhibition (fig. 4). This rare sculpture

had been discovered fully preserved in Lake Ngaroto, north of Te Awamutu, in 1906. Uenuku is the *kaitiaki* (guardian deity) for the Waikato people, who trace their ancestry to the Tainui *waka* (canoe). The guardianship of this carving remains entrusted to one family. Museum conservators deemed the piece too fragile to sustain the pressures of overseas travel. Contrary to their advice, and just a few days before packing crates were due to be closed for shipment to New York, a decision was reached. The Māori queen, Dame Te Atairangikāhu, had intervened, insisting at the final hour that the iconic ancestor of the Tainui tribal territories would lead the exhibition into a foreign land—just as he had led their Māori tribe from Hawaiki (the ancestral homelands of central Polynesia) to Aotearoa New Zealand centuries before. In this respect, these highly revered familial

treasures were understood to have adopted the role of ambassadors specifically charged by the Māori queen to raise the profile of Māori culture overseas.

CUSTOMARY PROTOCOLS

One of the major precedents established during the exhibition in New York was the way in which Māori knowledge and customary protocols guided and framed all events that took place within the physical space of The Met's galleries. Māori insisted that tribal representatives would accompany the *taonga* (ancestral treasures) to the United States, where they would lead all appropriate formalities including chants, speeches and oratory (*whaikōrero*), and prayer (*karakia*), an acknowledgment of the sacred (*tapu*) quality of the works of art. The Māori delegation was drawn from both north and south islands of Aotearoa New Zealand and represented *nga hau e wha* (the four winds of the land), a metaphor for the coming together of people from different places. Sciascia reflected on this decision, which determined that all proceedings would be run according to Māori priorities, and explained that an underlying objective was to present Māori art as an integrated whole. The individuals selected to travel overseas would ensure the visual arts would not “stand alone,” he said, but alongside the equally fundamental aspects of Māori culture such as the performing arts and oratory.¹⁴ Prior to leaving the country, elder Sonny Waru of Parihaka explained to a reporter that Māori accompanying the *taonga* to the United States were “part and parcel of the exhibition, caretakers of [our] sacred heirlooms.”¹⁵

Once in New York, Māori *kaumātua* (elders) participated in all opening events and organized appropriate ceremonial protocols, including the rites (*whakaheke tapu*) performed at dawn on September 10, 1984, which lifted the *tapu* (or potent sacred quality) of the ancestral works for a time, rendering them spiritually safe for the public to encounter (figs. 5, 6). Fresh greenery was placed around the base of Uenuku to honor the life and vitality of this important ancestral deity.¹⁶ Rousing speeches (*whaikōrero*) of welcome and tribute honored long-departed ancestors and entrusted the *taonga* to the care of the host institution. In his reciprocal speech, Newton acknowledged The Met's ongoing commitment to the custodial care of these precious heirlooms (fig. 7) and assured the Māori delegation, on behalf of The Met's staff and Trustees, that the Museum would honor these obligations. With the strict conventions of the *marae* (ceremonial ground) established within The Met's exhibition galleries, a subtle yet unprecedented shift in the Museum had come into effect that day: the gallery space



fig. 7 The Pukeroa Pā gateway is carried by seventeen men up the steps at The Met for unpacking and installation in the galleries.



became a *marae* for the duration of the exhibition. East Coast *kaumātua* (elder) Monita Delamere confirmed how deeply moving it had been to walk into The Met's galleries and experience their *taonga* on display for the first time: "[I] felt that all [my] tūpuna were alive there."¹⁷

The format established at The Met continued at each of the subsequent venues in St. Louis, San Francisco, and Chicago.¹⁸ In total, representatives from twenty-four Māori tribal groups accompanied the art and were hosted at each of the four U.S. venues. Impromptu events in the galleries allowed Māori to engage directly with both the art and public visitors to the exhibition. Many of the sculptures were addressed

with *waiata* (songs) and speeches by their living Māori descendants. Handed down through the generations, these highly prized works are referred to in Māori as *taonga tuku iho*—ancestral heirlooms (*taonga*) from the past (*tuku iho*). These *taonga* are cloaked in words, the chants and histories of oral tradition, which render each work of art *taumaha* (heavy), and enhance the spiritual value and status (*mana*) of the work, giving it layers of memory and meaning. Addressing their *taonga* with formal speeches and song, New York audiences witnessed at first hand the relationship of Māori with their art, appreciating that these were not static or deceased relics confined to a distant past, but commanding indices of

fig. 8 Tainui visitors honor their tribal deity Uenuku with a *waiata* (song) in the galleries upon the return of the exhibition to New Zealand. National Museum of New Zealand, Wellington, 1986

spiritual power that remained *in relation* with their living descendants (fig. 8). Far from being inanimate, works of art for Māori have dynamic agency that is activated and enlivened when encountered by living descendants who summon their connections through tribal identity and *whakapapa* (genealogy). While at The Met, each *taonga* was cloaked not only in customary oral traditions but also in the newly evolving stories and events born of the novel encounter with audiences in New York. The various events occurring daily in The Met's galleries would now be folded into the individual histories and biographies of each work going forward, enriching them further. Māori art now stood on the world stage, appreciated alongside

the art of the great civilizations of Greece and Rome, of China and Egypt: a canon expanded.

The critical acclaim Māori art received in the United States sent shock waves reverberating through New Zealand: "The publicity seemed to shatter our complacency because as a nation we had always regarded the carvings more as curios than art," wrote Bernard Kernot.¹⁹ Dedicated overwhelmingly to early ancestral sculpture, the items selected for exhibition in New York were canonical works described by Mead as powerful and authoritative, acknowledged masterpieces that would best represent "the rich visual harvest" that customary Māori art could offer.²⁰ Iconic works that lent themselves to the idea of a common cultural heritage among eastern Polynesian peoples were favored. The aforementioned rare deity figure Uenuku was a highlight of the show. Visitors were said to be taken with Uenuku's distinctive aesthetic form.²¹ A carved post almost nine feet tall, this imposing abstract sculpture is widely regarded as a masterpiece of Māori art. For the Tainui tribes of Waikato, the sculpture is the dwelling place of their guardian spirit Uenukutuwhatu. This impressive carving accompanied the Māori *tohunga*, or ritual specialist, into battle; its powerful agency (*mana*) was deployed as a spiritual armature that worked to enhance the group's efficacy. The carving bears what Mead described as "a haunting resemblance to Hawaiian carving," largely on account of the distinctive series of vertical prongs that rise up from the top of the figure's head.²² This highly abstracted comblike feature can be understood as an extension of the backbone or spine, a formal aspect of early Polynesian carving that implies genealogical principles, with each prong or notch a reference to a particular group's line of descent.²³ The sculpture's preeminent status in the show was derived largely from its formal qualities as a proto-Polynesian art form, that is, for the strong visual evidence of the connection of Māori to their earlier Polynesian forebears in the Hawaiian Islands.

Uenuku, the striking signature work on loan from Tainui, was featured on a centrally located open platform where it stood, elegantly majestic, in full command of the galleries. Other sculptural highlights included monumental gateways and large-scale canoe prows that were displayed as discrete freestanding elements or silhouetted against plain white walls. In general, singular works were presented in isolation, and illuminated dramatically to enhance their power and visual impact (figs. 9, 10). Māori broadcaster Henare Te Ua (Ngāti Porou) praised the installation, recalling his first impression on entering the New York galleries



figs. 9, 10 Installation views of "Te Maori" at The Met

on the morning of the opening: "The Metropolitan's design team opted away from the usual fusty-dusty, dimly lit displays which were so common in New Zealand institutions. Instead there was LIGHT!"²⁴

"Te Maori" is remembered precisely for this classificatory shift: the moment that Māori artifact became art, a transition effected primarily by the modernist aesthetic of its exhibition design.²⁵ General texts at the introduction to the exhibition hall initiated visitors to the cultural context of the objects. When known, dates, place names, and tribal affiliations were provided, but in general, contextual information was kept to a minimum. This presentation was a stark contrast to the ethnographic museum displays that were the usual public forum for Māori culture in New Zealand. Ethnology departments and natural history museums throughout the world had long

used collections of Māori artifacts as evidence of Māori culture in pre-European times, but their problematic displays were finally beginning to be acknowledged as reinforcing a static vision of an idealized past.²⁶ Reflecting on "Te Maori" at the end of its U.S. tour, Mead acknowledged that Māori art had first needed to be validated as fine art in New York before its appraisal as such could happen in New Zealand: "By taking our art to New York . . . we brought Maori art out from obscurity . . . out of the cupboard of primitive contextualization."²⁷

NEW DISPLAY CONVENTIONS: PACIFIC ART IN NEW YORK

New display conventions certainly played a significant role in developing an invigorated view of Māori art. A long-established hierarchy had relied on the problematic assumption that the creations of non-Western peoples were valuable in terms of their scientific interest (as "culture" or "craft"), but not for their intrinsic beauty or pure form (their "art" or "aesthetic").²⁸ By the 1930s and 1940s, this template had begun to yield to some pressure in Europe and the United States with the advent of a series of highly aestheticized installations of non-Western objects that took place in Paris and New York. These early exhibitions were conceived by gallerists, collectors, and dealers of indigenous artifacts who were strongly influenced by modernist primitivism and its tastes.²⁹ The earliest exhibition of Oceanic art in New York was precisely in this vein. Opening in 1934 at the Pierre Matisse Gallery on East 57th Street (October 29–November 17, 1934), it presented forty-four works of art and was the first exhibition dedicated solely to Oceanic art in the United States.³⁰ If the earliest advocates for presenting non-Western art were gallerists working in the sparse interiors of New York's downtown galleries, a small but dedicated cohort of art specialists and curators were soon to pick up the pace in the postwar era.

In 1946, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) staged an influential exhibition, "Arts of the South Seas," organized there by curator René d'Harnoncourt in collaboration with Columbia University anthropologist Ralph Linton and art historian Paul Wingert. Mexican painter Miguel Covarrubias was involved in the installation and produced illustrations for the accompanying catalogue, which declared: "many Maori carvings deserve to rank among the art masterpieces of the world."³¹ During the 1950s, the arts of the Pacific began to be taught at Columbia University by Wingert, and at New York University by Robert Goldwater, under the rubric of "primitive art." The courses were a first foray into the study of art from cultures that formerly



had been the domain of anthropology departments and laid the foundations for what would in time become a new discipline of art history in the United States. This scholarship focused on the so-called non-Western arts, which were defined at the time as the arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas (Native and Precolumbian) and hitherto had been excluded from the conventional canon of art history.

In 1953, Nelson Rockefeller established the Museum of Indigenous Art (renamed the Museum of Primitive Art in 1956) in a converted Manhattan brownstone on West 54th Street. It was the first museum of its kind in New York dedicated to celebrating the artistic achievements of those regions of the world whose artists Rockefeller believed had been grossly underserved by their exclusion from the canon. The museum's cofounder and vice president was René d'Harnoncourt, previously at MoMA. He recruited Goldwater as its director and several years later a young British enthusiast, the aforementioned Douglas Newton, joined the team. Together they oversaw an extensive program, producing some seventy exhibitions and nearly sixty publications between 1957 and 1974. The museum itself was fairly small, but the impact of its exhibition program on the perception of non-Western art museography, collectors, and the public was tremendous. Newton was especially prolific, and in 1960, he became a full curator, and in 1974 succeeded Goldwater as director. Determined to share Pacific art with the world, he made dedicated efforts to promote projects that would advance this relatively little-known field of art to new audiences. Newton was personally involved in designing scenography for each exhibition and soon developed a style that deployed atmospheric lighting to striking effect. The displays brought critical praise and public attention to the museum and introduced a mode of presentation that would become extremely influential for the showing of non-Western art in museums over the ensuing decades. At the heart of these aesthetic innovations was a clear and strategic aim. According to those who worked closely with him, Newton's overarching ambition was to "find a way to let the energy and vibrancy [of the works] sing out so that visitors could enjoy not only their temporal presence but also their spiritual aspect."³²

FORMAL AFFINITIES

In its celebration of the distinctive formal aesthetics of Māori art, "Te Maori" was strategically similar to another major presentation of Pacific art that was being prepared thirty blocks downtown from The Met at MoMA. "Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity

of the Tribal and the Modern"³³ opened to the public on September 27, 1984, and was initially well received, particularly by New York's fine art aficionados, who, one critic has suggested, "marveled freely at the wonderful ability of artists from 'tribal' societies to produce the works of sheer formal beauty which were on display."³⁴ They opened within three weeks of each other, and the critique that later developed in response to each exhibition could not have been in starker contrast.

The exhibition ran concurrently with The Met's "Te Maori" show for four months and provides a dramatic counterpoint in terms of responses to the range of museological frameworks within which Pacific art was circulating during this period. The ambitious exhibition at MoMA was organized by William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe and built very much on their associate Robert Goldwater's PhD dissertation, "Primitivism in Modern Painting" (1937), which charted the influence of African, Oceanic, and American precolonial traditions on twentieth-century art in the West. The exhibition dramatically juxtaposed 147 works by modern artists including Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Paul Gauguin, and Constantin Brancusi with 218 examples of African, Oceanic, Inuit, and Native American art. In his introductory essay to the catalogue, Rubin explained that he hoped to chart the influence of these non-Western art traditions on Europe's most renowned modernists.

Rubin's commitment to foreground the formal aesthetic of each tradition was explicit in the show's subtitle, "Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern." In an exhibition review of the show, Rubin commented on the sense of urgency, voiced by Picasso, "that art had to get back to being the kind of thing that did not mirror the world but changed [it], changing the man who made the art as well as the people who looked at it."³⁵ Outlining the art historical origins of the term "primitive,"³⁶ he pointed to the disillusionment of a cohort of late nineteenth-century artists with the classical genres of Western realism then favored by the conventions of art history enshrined in the Academy. Rejecting bourgeois tastes that demanded illusionist lighting and perspective, Rubin homed in on the interests of this avant-garde who were looking for renewed simplicity, and adopting a certain naïveté in their own work that they hoped would invigorate their painting. Grounded in a search for the rudely expressive, or "raw," elements, their work focused on capturing this elusive quality. Rubin elaborated on this idea, writing that the "exotic arts defined as 'primitive' by Gauguin's generation were being admired for many qualities that twentieth-century artists would prize in tribal art—[namely] an

expressive force deemed missing from the final phases of Western realism, which late nineteenth-century vanguard artists considered overattenuated and bloodless.³⁷ The MoMA exhibition aimed to bring this positive reappraisal of primitivism to light, establishing as fine art a genre that had hitherto been viewed as ethnographic and therefore more strictly within the purview of science museums. Far from the functional role so often assigned to this art, Rubin enthusiastically acknowledged its complexity and sophistication, and claimed the exhibition would highlight its range and innovation and show just how aesthetically, and intellectually, challenging the works really were.

The fact that non-Western works were presented exclusively in terms of their influence on Western artists was a bitter pill, however, for many quarters to swallow. Though clearly in keeping with Rubin's vision, the show's master narrative drew heavy criticism for its forced didactic approach.³⁸ Deploying African, Oceanic, and indigenous American works of art in the service of bolstering a substantively Western art historical thesis, with no account of the history and context of the works prior to their entry into European collections, the exhibition was lambasted for its reinforcement of these cultures as being somehow "ahistorical." The presentation fell into a dangerous trope, implying that indigenous cultures remain(ed) fundamentally out of sync with time—that is, timeless and static—not "modern" and evolving, or in step with time. The critics' reviews were harsh, dismissing the exhibition for alienating and emasculating the indigenous artists whose works were shown by reducing their contributions to a series of mere footnotes in Western art history.³⁹ In alleging an inherently "essential," or elemental, quality in these arts, the exhibition narrative implied the artistic instincts of indigenous artists were somehow primal—that is, unmediated. This denial of the agency of indigenous artists grossly misrepresented their equally strategic objectives in creating art and served to reinforce dangerously false dichotomies of alleged authenticity and acculturation.

The focus on formalism was not unique to the MoMA exhibition. The installation for "Te Maori" at The Met was equally invested in foregrounding the sculptural aspects of individual masterworks, creating a rarefied atmosphere that emphasized the apparently timeless quality of the pieces. A subtle yet steady dehistoricization was powerfully at play. One critique suggested that several of the more monumental works, Uenuku included, seemed to acquire a "burden and power of permanent spirituality"⁴⁰ that curators

seemed consciously to promote. This overtly essentialist construction of the Māori was equally problematic, as it insisted on a kind of folkloricised identity for Māori, implying that all Māori were (inherently) mystical and spiritual⁴¹ and therefore somehow "out of time."⁴² In short, though well-intentioned, the bestowal of the status of art on non-Western objects in both exhibits simply rendered them fetishes of another kind.⁴³

In his incisive analysis of the transformations at play in this giant museological puzzle, Conal McCarthy has argued that the reframing of Māori art at The Met was not at all straightforward, given that another significant factor was at work in the recategorization—that of Māori agency.⁴⁴ Māori curator Hirini Moko Mead's articulation of *taonga* overlapped with more conventional concepts of fine art *without* being fully equivalent to them.⁴⁵ McCarthy points out that, in contrast to the "disinterested aesthetic appreciation of European tradition, which values a distant viewer who prizes the formal qualities of an isolated object," Māori people interacted with the art, responding "in a direct, often physical, way to the *taonga*" and engaging them as activated vessels through which they could express their genealogical ties to ancestors.⁴⁶ Mina McKenzie (Ngāti Hauiti), director of the Manawatū Museum and a member of the "Te Maori" management committee, summed up the distinction in her analysis of responses to the art during the New York opening: "While the Americans and Douglas (Newton) were looking at 'Te Maori' for the excellence of its sculptural form," she reflected later, "Maori people were being re-united with their ancestors. Energy was flowing between the two concepts."⁴⁷ A new indigenous category of display was at work. *Taonga* appeared to represent a transitional category between the appreciated aesthetic qualities of the art and sculpture on display and an index of indigenous understanding that determined a unique set of values for Māori. The installation at The Met had allowed for two distinct categories in the culture of display—art and *taonga*—to become intertwined. The creation of a space that permitted Māori agency to express itself fully had shaken up the conditions of viewing. As such, the conventions of display were altered and now ushered in a period of change.

There was yet another layer to this turn of events. Reflecting on the phenomenon of "Te Maori" a decade later, Nicholas Thomas noted that while the "fetishization of an unacculturated authenticity" in Māori was initially disturbing, the resounding success of "Te Maori" during its nationwide U.S. tour dramatically heightened the status accorded to Māori at home and

abroad, which was clearly enabling and empowering for many Māori.⁴⁸ While tensions from the Māori community had been apparent from the outset of the exhibition, most *kaumātua* (elders) had come round to supporting the proposal in the end, reassured that an opportunity to showcase Māori culture internationally outweighed any other perceived risk.

It was a younger generation of Māori who continued to be vehement in their resistance to the principles behind the project, believing that the pieces ought to have been shown in New Zealand first. It was specifically this younger group who was troubled by an idealized version of Māori that the show seemed to promote and an association with archaism that they found especially constricting.⁴⁹ The categorical exclusion of a strong corpus of more experimental Māori art was strongly contested by this group, who insisted the selection of *taonga* was narrow and old-fashioned, and reinforced a romanticized image of classical Māori locked in the past. It completely elided the genre of transitional works characteristic of nineteenth-century art production in New Zealand, which were dynamic and innovative, a direct response of Māori to their encounter with Europeans. They believed the show was just another example of the continued marginalization of Māori. The handful of transitional pieces included in the U.S. show were a carved club and whalebone ax (*patiti*) that incorporated iron blades, and a model canoe that catered to European tastes.⁵⁰ No contemporary Māori art was included at all. Neither, incidentally, were woven textiles (*raranga*) such as fine cloaks (*kākahu*), mats (*whāriki*), or baskets (*kete*). This work, the customary domain of women, was another glaring omission, one that would be rectified when the show was adapted for the New Zealand tour that followed.⁵¹ Nevertheless, the initial prioritization of sculpture in wood, stone, and bone spoke forcefully to a reliance on a Eurocentric definition of what constituted “fine arts,” one that relegated spectacular Māori fiber arts to the category of “craft.” This younger generation of Māori considered the restriction of works to overtly traditional pieces not only frustratingly out of touch but irresponsible. For them, this was a siphoned representation of Māori that ignored the contemporary urban reality of 1980s New Zealand and was starkly at odds with the Māori activism and militancy that were a hallmark of the era.

TE HOKINGA MAI / THE RETURN HOME

More than seventy thousand members of the public attended “Te Maori” in its opening month at The Met and visitor numbers continued to break records at

subsequent venues in St. Louis, San Francisco, and Chicago, reaching more than 621,000. As the exhibition approached the conclusion of its U.S. tour, the sponsors viewed a return tour around New Zealand as a logical extension to its successful run overseas. This was an important opportunity to build on the show’s momentum and share its international success with the wider New Zealand public. The exhibition returned to New Zealand as “Te Maori—*Te Hokinga Mai* (The Return Home)” and was hosted in each of New Zealand’s four major cities. Māori involvement as it toured New Zealand was further amplified. The organizing committee worked with each venue to facilitate the broad participation of Māori, who visited the exhibition in droves and interacted with the public as hosts. Māori devised all cultural programming related to the exhibition and visitors were welcomed by elders (*kaumātua*) and expertly guided by *kaiārahi* (Māori hosts), a younger generation of Māori who were direct descendants of the ancestral works on display.

The New Zealand tour surpassed all expectations. Unprecedented crowds visited each of the four venues, which included two museums, the National Museum of New Zealand in Wellington and Otago Museum in Dunedin, and two art galleries, the Robert McDougall Art Gallery in Christchurch and Auckland City Art Gallery. The final venue in Auckland closed its doors to the public on September 10, 1987, exactly three years to the day after the auspicious dawn ceremonies that had inaugurated the exhibition in New York. Attendance records indicate some 917,500 people visited the exhibition on its New Zealand tour, a staggering twenty-eight percent of the entire population.⁵² Mead’s colleague, university lecturer Bernie Kernot, described the New Zealand tour as unleashing “the most remarkable cultural phenomenon this country has ever experienced.”⁵³ The revision of status for Māori art was dramatic. Buoyed by the energy of the show and its reception, Māori were hopeful that their engagement and full participation in all levels of the exhibition would translate into meaningful change and advance their prospects in a society that by the mid- to late 1980s had become increasingly underpinned by an emerging aspirational ideology of biculturalism.

The enhanced profile and status of Māori art raised the visibility of Māori within their own nation. Releasing Māori art from the outdated displays that had long prevailed in New Zealand museums dramatically changed its perception and Māori came now to be seen in a new light, their culture no longer consigned to the past. For Māori, the orchestrating role of The Met in this

metamorphosis was key. Within its walls, Māori art had undergone a radical recontextualization that led to its subsequent recoding from museum artifact to aesthetic work of art, with a further acknowledgment of its agency. The shift in perspective raised expectations among Māori who were keen to leverage their new cultural currency in socially impactful ways. As Māori confidence and self-esteem climbed to new heights, the stage was set for a broader consolidation of social and economic issues that the success of the exhibition had thrown into sharp relief.

The 1980s were a decade of enormous social upheaval in New Zealand, with unemployment rising in the cities and appalling social statistics for Māori in terms of poverty, health, and education. The decade had begun with vigorous protest. Opposition to the South African rugby tour of New Zealand by the Springboks in 1981 caused widespread antiapartheid protests and turned the spotlight on racism in New Zealand. *Te reo Māori* (Māori language) was finally recognized as an official language in 1987 following a petition to Parliament fifteen years earlier, in 1972. Land sovereignty and political autonomy remained firmly on the agenda and now hinged on the broader momentum that "Te Maori" had set in motion. The long-advocated "integration" of Māori into wider society⁵⁴ was rejected with calls to supplant it with a bicultural model that would accommodate both Māori and Pakeha (New Zealand citizens of European descent) interests, which many believed would safeguard a measure of autonomy for Māori. In 1955, Maha Winiata dismissed the idea that "Maori should become a pocket edition of the pakeha." Against the refrain "We are all New Zealanders," he advocated for a bicultural model: "Two peoples, one nation."⁵⁵ In many ways, "Te Maori" galvanized a Māori agenda to assert autonomy. A "social and cultural renaissance [was] now moving Maoridom, and ["Te Maori" had] become the standardbearer of the movement."⁵⁶

MANA MOTUHAKE / SELF-DETERMINATION

If the notoriety of "Te Maori" in the 1980s became synonymous with the transformation of Māori art on the world stage, its ongoing legacy must acknowledge its role as a catalyst in reframing the ways indigenous communities came to engage with museums. "Te Maori" marked a radical turning point in the relationship of Māori with museums, accelerating dramatic reforms to museum practice in New Zealand, which in turn have impacted other indigenous communities throughout the Pacific and Australia. While Māori had felt largely dislocated from their cultural heritage, which was held in trust by museums on their behalf, the experience of

"Te Maori" now exposed a strongly felt urge to reconnect with it. Māori broadcaster Henare Te Ua called for more imaginative displays in institutions that would better align *te ao Māori* (the Māori world) with the museological world.⁵⁷ This would be an opportunity to showcase the wealth of *taonga* in museum collections that had long languished behind the scenes: "Mini *Te Māori*'s could be devised together with Maori . . . involvement,"⁵⁸ he suggested. The relationship, he believed, must be reciprocal and not one-way. In advocating for increased collaboration, he outlined the model for a new type of institution that could accommodate input from Māori stakeholders who now felt empowered to invest themselves more fully in its activities.

A politicized agenda for the museum sector had begun to take shape and was becoming strongly aligned with Māori demands for self-determination (*mana motuhake*). Progress with a variety of claims under the Treaty of Waitangi now prompted Māori advocates to link the Treaty and its implications of partnership to the governance of museums.⁵⁹

These developments included a proposal for government titled *Nga Taonga o Te Motu: Treasures of the Nation*, which advocated for a new national museum that would incorporate Māori worldviews and a Polynesian cultural center. It was supported by Māori Member of Parliament Pita Tapsell, minister of internal affairs, and backed by several museum professionals.⁶⁰ Planning for the new museum involved a high level of Māori participation with direct input from *iwi* (tribal authorities). New legal precedents cited specific principles of the Treaty of Waitangi as a means to determine the indigenous governance and structure of the new museum. For example, lawyer Moana Jackson interpreted Article Two of the Treaty of Waitangi, which guaranteed Māori "complete . . . authority over all their taonga," as including exhibitions of *taonga* Māori in museums. The Treaty also placed "an obligation on museum authorities and Māori to be equally involved in the planning, design, staffing, and management of the institution."⁶¹ Seen within an international context, this degree of indigenous influence was extraordinary.

The outcome was a blueprint for a new National Museum of New Zealand—Te Papa Tongarewa, which opened in an impressively designed building on Wellington's waterfront in 1998. Deploying a highly innovative framework for museum governance, the museum would operate in accordance with the official governmental policy of biculturalism that was formally reflected in its bilateral management structure. The institution immediately committed to the hiring of

Māori and Pacific Islanders on its staff and adopted customary practices in its custodial care of the collections. The “Te Māori Manaaki Trust” continues to promote professional development programs and training for Māori curators and conservators to support professional museum careers.

“Te Maori” helped bring about a new cultural and political climate in New Zealand. The phenomenal success of its U.S. run garnered new respect for Māori art, raising its *mana* (prestige) and mobilizing enthusiasm to pave the way for a renaissance of Māori arts and culture, and language revitalization.

CONCLUSION: A LIVING DYNAMIC

In 1984, a pair of New York exhibitions challenged audiences to glean a radical new appreciation for the innovative and dynamic art forms of the Pacific. While the “‘Primitivism’ in 20th Century Art” exhibition at MoMA hoped to emphasize the clear influence this novel and exciting aesthetic had imparted to European artists of the avant-garde, “Te Maori” was shaped considerably in consultation with Māori, whose strong presence and participation highlighted a living dynamic. This set a precedent and foregrounded the distinctiveness of *taonga* as a new category of art, one that was animated in direct encounter with its indigenous descendants. At its most fundamental level, the exhibition prompted a critical dialogue, one, McCarthy opines, that “went far beyond the limited . . . analysis of the politics of display to result in real, concrete changes in New Zealand museum practice.”⁶² “Te Maori” created a platform for a new field of engagement, one where, McCarthy observes, “*taonga* were performed not installed.”⁶³ Māori visitors were concerned with reclaiming and reconnecting to their ancestors: it was the contact with the *taonga* and one another and the connections that were made that were paramount, not the particular way in which they were presented.⁶⁴ While it was Māori themselves who led the initiative, The Met as an institution proved itself open and agile in accommodating their demands and allowing a space in which different cultural priorities could interact.

“Te Maori” was the first major exhibition of Pacific art following the establishment of the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing in 1982, which ushered in a dynamic new era in The Met’s history. Now, almost four decades later, the generative impact of “Te Maori” continues to be influential. The collaborative model it established—one that favors the engagement of indigenous communities as partners in the interpretation of their art—has evolved as an international standard of best practice for

museums with holdings of Māori and Pacific art. As public demand for institutions to “cede” authority heightens, the legacy of “Te Maori” reminds us of the value in “seed-ing” legacies,⁶⁵ when museums can take the lead in nurturing newly configured relationships with the indigenous communities whose collections they steward. As sites of encounter—or “contact zones”⁶⁶—at the center of public discourse, they can provide a critical and creative space where the complexities of colonial histories and injustices can be confronted and teased apart. Museums need to continue to evolve in response to their respective communities and find ways to remain actively engaged with their needs. Given the inherently asymmetrical nature of the relations between museums and their constituents, James Clifford (and Robin Boast after him) insists this engagement needs to be continually assessed in concert with indigenous communities, arguing that successful “Contact work in a museum . . . goes beyond consultation and sensitivity. . . . It becomes active collaboration and a sharing of authority.”⁶⁷ Furthermore, a lack of nuance in the critique of museums as instruments of colonial power and nation building can obscure the long history of indigenous adaptation and exchange that has been underway for decades now since “Te Maori.”⁶⁸ These experiences underscore the extent to which the “interaction of indigenous people with Western cultural practices”⁶⁹ can be highly productive in strategically resisting and accommodating the colonial project from within.⁷⁰

If “Te Maori” showed that museums and their galleries have the potential to become active and dynamic spaces, Māori understand that in many respects, ancestral heirlooms—or *taonga*—were in fact designed to leverage these kinds of relationships. This is their role and agency. Three key Māori concepts now strongly align with the way the present author relates to an engaged curatorial practice in the museum today: the concept of *manaakitanga*—that is, hosting people as a way to nurture relationships; *whanaungatanga*—the idea of kinship and bringing people together; *kaitiakitanga*—the duty of care inherent in stewardship (of people, land, the environment). The ongoing stewardship of collections requires institutions that can actively accommodate its attendant responsibilities and the reciprocal relations necessary for indigenous interlocutors to advocate for the ways in which they would like to be represented. As well as a repository of the past, collections are living resources for creative interventions that have the power to effect change.⁷¹ Rather than trying to confine collections, a more productive strategy must be to continue to engage them in active and dynamic ways (figs. 11, 12).

fig. 11 Jahra Wasasala performs *Bure Kalou: God House* for Māori and Pacific communities at the closing ceremony for "Atea: Nature and Divinity in Polynesia" on October 26, 2019, at The Met.

fig. 12 Closing ceremony for "Atea: Nature and Divinity in Polynesia" on October 26, 2019, with Māori and Pacific communities in New York



EPILOGUE

Beyond the glazed windows of the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing at The Met in New York, a single fragment of shaved wood lies buried in the rich soil of New York's Central Park, the result of an unusual and rare departure from the strict conventions of museum protocols. Prior to their departure from New Zealand in 1984, senior Māori spoke carefully with Museum conservators to make a final request before the crates were closed. Their wishes were accommodated and five carefully pared sections of wood were removed from the undersurface of one of the most celebrated works being prepared for travel to New York: the magnificently carved doorway (*kuwaha*) and bargeboards (*maihi*) from Te Potaka, a storehouse (*pataka*) that was one of three that once stood at Maraenui in 1780, on the tribal lands of Te Whānau-ā-Apanui in the eastern Bay of Plenty.⁷² One fragment was buried in New Zealand. During the opening ceremonies for "Te Maori" in New York, the first of the remaining

fragments of wood was planted in Central Park. A further paring was to be buried at each of the next two venues, binding the three dispersed locations into a network.⁷³ The final fragment was to be crumbled into the ocean when the exhibition returned, "to carry the spirit of the exhibition safely home."⁷⁴ One of these small but significant wooden fragments remains buried in the park, calling its descendants close, an active reminder of the reciprocal relations established that brisk September morning shortly after dawn, and ensuring that the obligations and responsibilities enshrined in those initial exchanges with Māori extend into the future.

In memoriam: "Uncle Bill," Hemi Wiremu Maxwell, QSM (1929–2021)

MAIA NUKU (NGAI TAI)

Evelyn A. J. Hall and John A. Friede Curator for Oceanic Art in the Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, Department of the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

NOTES

- 1 Original film footage of the opening protocols for the "Te Maori" exhibition can be seen at <http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/video/44092/te-maori-exhibition-opening-new-york-1984>.
- 2 "Art of Oceania, Africa, and the Americas from the Museum of Primitive Art" opened at The Met in 1969. Nelson Rockefeller announced his intention to transfer the MPA's collection, staff, and library to The Met at the press conference that accompanied the opening.
- 3 McCarthy 2016, 59.
- 4 The exhibition "The Art of the Pacific Islands" (July 1, 1979–February 7, 1980) took place at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. Douglas Newton oversaw the selection of more than four hundred works of art from eighty-three lenders around the world and assisted Gaillard Ravenel and Mark Leithauer in the exhibition design. Gordon Anson designed the lighting. Newton also coauthored a catalogue to accompany the exhibition with Adrienne Kaeppler and Peter Gathercole (Gathercole, Kaeppler, and Newton 1979).
- 5 Crighton 2014, 202.
- 6 For further reading on this topic, see LaGamma et al. 2014.
- 7 Hamish Keith in correspondence dated October 27, 1984, to the *New Zealand Listener*; cited in Kernot 1987, 3–4. McCarthy (2016, 59) notes that while the extent of Māori involvement may not have been fully anticipated in 1972, an early proposal by the Art Galleries and Museums Association of New Zealand (AGMANZ) included a suggestion that Māori could be involved as guides for visitors in the galleries. By the time Hamish Keith (QEII Arts Council) and Kenneth Coulton Gorbey (AGMANZ) revived the idea of an exhibition in 1979, the cultural and political climate in New Zealand was quite different and an Arts Council report (September 1980) made it clear that Māori values would need to be taken into account in all aspects of planning.
- 8 Puketapu in Murphy 1983.
- 9 *Te Māori: He tukunga korero / A Report* (Wellington: Te Māori Management Committee, 1988); cited in McCarthy 2007, 139.
- 10 Mead 1984–85, 26.
- 11 McCarthy 2007, 139.
- 12 Sciascia in Murphy 1983; cited in McCarthy 2007, 138.
- 13 O'Biso 1987, 176.
- 14 Sciascia in Murphy 1983; cited in McCarthy 2007, 139.
- 15 Waru cited in *Dom*, November 14, 1983; quoted in McCarthy 2007, 139.
- 16 The *kaumātua* (elders) who led ceremonial rites for the New York opening were *tohunga* Sonny Waru of Taranaki, Sir James Henare representing the northern *iwi* (tribes), Ruka Broughton for Poneke (Wellington region), Monita Delamere of Mātaatua, and Waikato leader Henare Tuwhangai. John Te Kaho, a Māori security guard employed by The Met, ensured that the greenery at Ueneku's feet was regularly replaced for the duration of the exhibition.
- 17 As recounted by Con Te Rata Jones to Conal McCarthy, August 19, 2002; cited in McCarthy 2007, 141.
- 18 Beginning in New York at The Met (September 10, 1984–January 6, 1985), the exhibition continued to the St. Louis Art Museum, Missouri (February 22–May 26, 1985), and the M. H. de Young Memorial Museum in San Francisco (July 6–December 1, 1985). Due to its resounding success, the Field Museum of Natural History negotiated an extension of the tour for Chicago (March 6–June 8, 1986).
- 19 Kernot 1987, 3.
- 20 Mead 1986, 34.
- 21 Katene 1984.
- 22 Mead 1984, 183.
- 23 Kaeppler 1982, 103.
- 24 Te Ua 1987, 7.
- 25 Gathercole 2002.
- 26 While "Te Maori" was a quantum leap in terms of indigenous engagement, Roger Neich at the Auckland Institute and Museum

- had selected highlights from the Māori collection at Auckland for an exhibition that toured China in 1978 (McCarthy 2016, 42). Neich also curated two exhibitions for the National Museum in Wellington: “Maori Art for America” (1983) and “Nga Taonga Hou o Aotearoa: New National Treasures” (1984), which McCarthy notes “prefigured ‘Te Maori’ in their aestheticized display of carving as art and . . . familiarity with the concept of *taonga*” (ibid.).
- 27 Mead 1986, 11.
- 28 Duncan 1995, 12; cited in McCarthy 2007, 95.
- 29 Staniszewski 1998, 98–99; cited in McCarthy 2007, 95. The Cubist fascination with African art encountered in French ethnographic museums at the turn of the twentieth century led to major changes in the way African and Oceanic objects began to be received as works of art, exhibited and displayed in Paris and New York (Biro 2018; Steiner 2002, 137–38). By the 1920s, the expressive charge of Oceanic art had attracted the attention of the Surrealists and Expressionists (Peltier 1984; Clifford 1988, 136).
- 30 “Oceanic Art” (October 29–November 17, 1934), Pierre Matisse Gallery, 41 East 57th Street, New York. Philippe Peltier (1984, 115) published a photograph of the exhibition in his chapter “From Oceania,” which traces the early history of collecting and exhibiting Oceanic art. The Pierre Matisse Gallery produced a pamphlet with brief text by Frederick R. Pleasants and Georges Henri Rivière, then associate director of the Musée d’Ethnographie du Trocadéro in Paris, which lists forty-four works of art—all from New Guinea with the exception of seven Polynesian works. A copy of this pamphlet is in the Robert Goldwater Library at The Met; the original is held in the library at MoMA. I am grateful to Sarah Ligner and Nicolas Garnier of the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris for drawing it to my attention (personal communication, January 6, 2020).
- 31 Linton, Wingert, and d’Harnoncourt 1946, 55. For more details on the exhibition design of a range of early Oceanic art exhibitions at MoMA, see Elligott 2018.
- 32 Clifford La Fontaine, personal communication, December 4, 2020.
- 33 The exhibition opened at MoMA (September 27, 1984–January 15, 1985) and continued to the Detroit Institute of Arts (February 27–May 19, 1985) and the Dallas Museum of Art (June 23–September 1, 1985).
- 34 Thomas 1999, 188.
- 35 Rubin quoted in Campbell 1984.
- 36 For a close analysis of the cultural construction of the term “primitivism” that emerged in European discourse during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Connelly 1995.
- 37 Rubin 1984, 1:2.
- 38 Clifford 1988, 212. Clifford clarified that, to his mind, museums of art and anthropology were equally guilty of ignoring the contemporary realities of indigenous cultures in their strategies to constitute either an impression of “authentic, ‘traditional’ worlds” (often imagined as a pristine era prior to “contact”) or to situate their appreciation of the outcome of indigenous creativity “in the timeless category of ‘art’” (ibid., 200); see also Clifford 1985. The suppression of cultural context in the latter was “almost a precondition for artistic appreciation. In this object system, a tribal piece is detached from one milieu in order to circulate freely in another, a world of art—of museums, markets and connoisseurship” (Clifford 1988, 200).
- 39 See McEvilley 1984 and Foster 1985.
- 40 Thomas 1999, 187.
- 41 Ibid., 185.
- 42 Fabian 2014.
- 43 Conn 1998, 257; McCarthy 2004, 152. See also Price 1989 and Torgovnick 1990 on the inherent inequities of these designations.
- Sally Price (1989, 68–69) points out that it is usually Western arbiters of taste whose discerning eye can elevate a singular object (but not another) to the status of “art.” Marianna Torgovnick (1990, 82) explains further that it is precisely this act of elevation that “reproduces, in the aesthetic realm, the dynamics of colonialism, since Western standards control the flow . . . and can bestow or withhold the label ‘art.’”
- 44 McCarthy 2004, 152.
- 45 McCarthy 2007, 140.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 McKenzie quoted in Butler 1996, 52; cited in McCarthy 2007, 141.
- 48 Thomas 1994, 188.
- 49 Ibid., 190. A counterargument established that the exhibition’s focus on “classical” examples of Māori art was a necessary measure to emphasize the *longue durée* of Māori history and the richness of its ancient culture. Reflecting on the exhibition’s impact prior to its New Zealand tour, the Māori queen, Te Arikunui Dame Te Atairangikāhu, expressed her hope that it would “help New Zealanders of ancestry other than Māori to be more aware of our Nation’s ancient history and culture (which . . . [contrary to what] so many think, did not commence in the late 19th century and particularly 1840).” The latter refers to the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi between Māori and the British Crown. See Te Atairangikāhu 1986, 2.
- 50 These items were listed in the exhibition catalogue as nos. 132, 105, and 113 (Mead 1984, 219, 209, and 212) respectively.
- 51 The exhibition “*Te Aho Tapu / The Sacred Thread: Traditional Maori Weaving*,” organized by the Auckland Institute and Museum (July 1987–February 1988), was intended as a corrective to this exclusion of Māori fiber and woven works in the “Te Maori” touring exhibition. See Pendergrast 1987. Despite the decision not to include weaving in “Te Maori,” one finely woven basket (*kete whakairo*) was presented as a gift to The Met by Turirangi Te Kani and Monita Delamere after the dawn ceremony in New York to mark the occasion of the opening on September 10, 1984. This *kete whakairo* (MMA 1984.518) was made by Kerehi Makiwhara or Grace Mawell (Whakatōhea, Ngai Tai and Te Whānau-ā-Apanui), a close relation of the author. It forms the foundation of a small but growing collection of Māori fiber works in The Met’s Oceanic art collection.
- 52 Butler 1996, 9.
- 53 Kernot 1987, 3.
- 54 Walker 1992, 503.
- 55 *New Zealand Listener*, March 25, 1955, 24–25; quoted in McCarthy 2007, 102–3.
- 56 Kernot 1987, 7.
- 57 Te Ua 1987, 9. Māori scholar Professor Ngahuia Te Awakotuku MNZM was curator of ethnology at Waikato Museum in the 1980s and another powerful early voice in the movement urging museums to rethink how they represented Māori culture. See Te Awakotuku 1991, preface.
- 58 Te Ua 1987, 9.
- 59 The Waitangi Tribunal, created under the Treaty of Waitangi Act (1975), was charged with investigating and making recommendations for claims brought by Māori against the British Crown that alleged failures to honor the Treaty of Waitangi (a foundational, and highly contested, document signed on February 6, 1840, by representatives of HM Queen Victoria and Māori chiefs in the North Island of New Zealand). See McCarthy 2007, 155.
- 60 McCarthy 2007, 155.
- 61 Jackson 1988, 2; cited in McCarthy 2007, 155.
- 62 McCarthy 2016, 4.

- 63 McCarthy 2004, 152.
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Hawaiian curator Noelle Kahanu conceived this analogy for a panel convened by the Pacific History Association (December 3, 2018) when she was invited to respond, alongside curators Nicholas Thomas and Peter Brunt, to the “Oceania” exhibition (September 29–December 10, 2018) at the Royal Academy, London, in a session chaired by Professor Dame Anne Salmond ONZ DBE FRSNZ.
- 66 Clifford 1997.
- 67 Ibid., 210; see also Boast 2011. For further reading, see Clifford (1987) for his analysis of ways in which these relations can be productive, despite the relative imbalance of power, and how museums can ensure participation is not merely superficial. See also Christina Kreps, who urges us to “liberate our thinking from a Eurocentric view of what constitutes a museum . . . to better recognize alternative forms [and imagine] a new museological discourse in which the points of reference are no longer solely determined by the West” (Kreps 2003, 145–46). See also Peers and Brown (2003), who agree that this shift toward recognition and deep engagement with communities has led to a radical re-envisioning of the very nature of museums.
- 68 McCarthy 2016, 4.
- 69 Ibid., 5.
- 70 For detailed literature on relations between indigenous communities and museums in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, see Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Myers 2002; Peers and Brown 2003; McCarthy 2007; Sully 2007; Morphy 2008; and Philipps 2011.
- 71 For further reading, including a range of these creative strategies and examples of specific projects with indigenous Pacific communities, see Nuku 2017, 2018, and 2020.
- 72 See Mead 1984, 204–5, no. 91. The carvings were removed and taken to Raukokore by 1818, then hidden in a sea cave at Te Kaha during the Ngāpuhi musket raids before being recovered in 1912 and taken to the Auckland Institute and Museum.
- 73 The first of these splinters was buried in the grounds of the Auckland Institute and Museum in New Zealand and the remaining four were wrapped in a woven flax (*harakeke*) panel. It was intended that three of these be buried on-site at each of the three venues in the United States (New York, St. Louis, San Francisco; the extra U.S. venue—Chicago—was added at a later date). As a further point of anecdotal interest, the original location of the *pataka* at the site of Maraenui is well known to the author, as it borders her own ancestral lands, east of Ngai Tai’s boundary, and close to the site of the homestead at Tunapahore where the author’s mother, Esther Kerr Jessop QSM ONZM, grew up.
- 74 O’Biso 1987, 114.

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The Vélez Blanco Patio and United States–Cuba Relationships in the 1950s

TOMMASO MOZZATI

In May 1933, Walker Evans traveled to Havana to collect images for *The Crime of Cuba*, a book by journalist and historian Carleton Beals. Written when Franklin D. Roosevelt's support of the Good Neighbor Policy was dictating the agenda of the North and South American continents, Beals's essay would be a denunciation of American imperialism and the increasing economic control of Washington, DC, over the Caribbean state. Evans's agreement with the publisher J. B. Lippincott was signed with a clear condition: "I am not illustrating a book. I'd like to just go down there and make some pictures, but don't tell me what to do."¹

During a stay lasting four weeks, the photographer captured about four hundred images, focusing on Havana's people and daily life. Through portraits and

fig. 1 Walker Evans
(American, 1903–1975).
Havana Shopping District,
1933. Gelatin silver print,
9% × 6% in. (24.4 × 15.5 cm).
The J. Paul Getty Museum,
Los Angeles. © Walker
Evans Archive, The
Metropolitan Museum of Art

cityscapes, often taken along the streets of the capital, Evans was able to underscore the ambiguous and complex state of the island under the dictatorship of Gerardo Machado y Morales (who would choose exile only a few months later, in August 1933). The extensive photographic campaign revealed Evans's empathy and nuanced political awareness. One of the most moving shots is the tender, lively, and beautifully framed image titled *Havana Shopping District*, its severe compositional scheme disrupted by animated human presence (fig. 1).

Such oppositions are the means by which Evans translated political and cultural tensions into formal terms. The two boys occupying the space at the bottom right become emblems of the multiracial and multicultural heritage (*mestizaje*) of Cuba's inhabitants. In the



opposite corner, the Coca-Cola brand dominates a varied display of local publications: the independent weekly *Bohemia*, illustrated with the national flag; the conservative *Carteles*, with an elegant Deco cover; and the popular *Cinelandia*, pretending to be “publicada en Hollywood.” Within the fairly rigid compositional grid (the only element indicating motion is the tow-headed boy), Evans isolates the principal competing forces in the polyphonic panorama of contemporary Cuban society: beguiled and dependent on overwhelming U.S. influence while committed to defining its own unique culture and place on the international stage.²

The climate of political tension in which Cuban governments remained viable only by becoming part of the seemingly benevolent protectorate of Washington, DC, forms a chapter in the history of one of the grandest works of art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, the patio from the Spanish Castle of Vélez Blanco (fig. 2). Walking through the serene gallery built to house the marble architectural elements from Vélez Blanco, one admires the elegant proportions of the two-story arcade, the simple rhythms of the baluster staircase, the sheer beauty of the carving on the doors and window frames, and the magisterial lettering on the crowning inscription. It is difficult to imagine that this Renaissance masterpiece remained in storage at The Met for almost two decades or that the Museum considered donating it to Cuba in the late 1940s. But such was the case. The original meaning of a work of art, determined by the culture that produced it, is changed over time by the cultures that inherit, appropriate, buy, loot, steal, care for, neglect, or destroy the work. As the Vélez Blanco patio passed from Spain to France to the United States, its changing meaning was inflected by the values of those who owned it and those who desired to possess it. Perhaps at no time was this process more blatant than before the 1953–59 Cuban Revolution, when the Vélez Blanco patio was understood as a prize in the international game of Cold War politics.

EARLY HISTORY OF THE VÉLEZ BLANCO PATIO

The internal courtyard of Vélez Blanco's citadel in the south of Spain originally was commissioned and built to send a strong political message. In 1503, Isabella of Castile granted the fortress to Pedro Fajardo y Chacón, whose family played a major role in the Christian conquest of that region and who was given the title of marquis of Los Vélez in 1507.³ Following his acquisition of the lands once dominated by the Nasrid dynasty, Pedro Fajardo began to completely renovate the castle. Executed between 1506 and 1515, employing classical



fig. 2 Patio from the Castle of Vélez Blanco. Spanish, Almería, ca. 1506–15. Marble of Macael (Sierra de Filabres), H. (to top of cornice) 33 × W. 44 × L. 63 ft. (10 × 13.4 × 19.2 m). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of George Blumenthal, 1941 (41.190.482)

architectural forms and decorative reliefs inspired by Renaissance Italy, the patio was conceived as an emblem of Spanish hegemony that linked the Christian conquest of the Iberian Peninsula to that of imperial Rome.⁴

Pedro Fajardo's descendants cared for the fortress, considering it an indispensable relic of dynastic prestige. However, with the end of the Fajardo line between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Vélez Blanco entered a slow, inexorable decline.⁵ In 1904, the patio was sold to the dealer J. Goldberg. The outcry against the sale transformed the patio into a politicized symbol of the flagrant neglect and abuse of the Spanish national patrimony. In the court of public opinion in Spain, the sale was considered an act of spoliation and vilified as a surrender to the lure of francs and dollars: "the power of gold . . . the zeal of a wealthy, foreign amateur, a more sincere admirer than we of our national glories" had accomplished "this last attack against the precious monument."⁶ In 1904, Fernando Palanques Ayén,

one of the most active voices against the sale, emphasized the Spanish government's culpability, stating that even against the "rights of the legitimate owners," the government could have protected a work of art that "national love, more than anything, has had to perpetuate . . . because its salvation was not only an honor for this region, but for Spain as a community."⁷

From Vélez Blanco, the patio was sent, via Cartagena and Marseille, to Paris, where it was purchased in 1910 by George Blumenthal. A wealthy, famous banker born in Frankfurt am Main in 1858, Blumenthal built his fortune in the United States through his strong working relationship with J. Pierpont Morgan. At the time of the patio's acquisition, Blumenthal and his wife, Florence, were assembling an immense collection of art treasures, most of them secured on the European market. The Blumenthals' acquisition of the marble elements of the patio from Vélez Blanco testifies to the couple's *au courant* tastes.

fig. 3 Mattie Edwards Hewitt. Vélez Blanco patio in the Blumenthal house, New York, 1928. Photograph. [Hewitt] 1928, pl. 10

fig. 4 Vélez Blanco patio in the Blumenthal house, New York, 1941. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, curatorial file for 41.190.482

Americans were paying increasing attention to Iberian art, a phenomenon that reoriented the purchases of important collectors such as William Randolph Hearst, Archer M. Huntington, Isabella Stewart Gardner, Henry Clay Frick, and Charles Deering.⁸

When conceiving contemporary enterprises like the Spanish patio at Fenway Court in Boston (planned by Gardner in 1908) or Palau de Maricel in Sitges (built by Deering between 1910 and 1916), it is not surprising that Blumenthal earmarked the Vélez Blanco marbles to furnish his new home on 70th Street and Park Avenue. Design of the house began in 1911, led by the prominent architectural firm Trowbridge and Livingston in collaboration with L. Alavoine & Co. and Arthur S. Vernay Inc. for the interior decoration.⁹ In the opulent mansion, the patio was located in the ample space of the central hall, where it imposingly organized the building's open multistoried interior (figs. 3, 4).¹⁰ Following the architects' design, the original marble components from Vélez Blanco were combined with additional modern elements, since not all parts of the patio had been removed from their original location in Spain, including a portion of the frieze with waterspouts in the form of gargoyles.¹¹ While the residence's facade was inspired by a severe neo-Renaissance style, the lavish central hall echoed the rich picturesque effects of the Spanish Colonial Revival, which was uncommon in New York's luxury homes.¹²

PLANS TO RECONSTRUCT THE VÉLEZ BLANCO PATIO AT THE MET

Blumenthal, who was president of The Met's Board of Trustees from 1934 until his death in 1941, bequeathed the Upper East Side mansion and its contents to the Museum. After carefully deliberating whether to develop the residence into a branch of The Met, as Blumenthal had requested, the Board decided that it would be more fiscally prudent to sell the ex-president's mansion.¹³ Blumenthal himself had contemplated this outcome and, in his pragmatism, even provided instructions for the sale.¹⁴ A comprehensive series of conversations and site visits beginning in autumn 1943 ensured that the home's important structural fittings, including the patio, were gathered, packed up, and safeguarded before the building was demolished to liquidate the plot of land.

The efforts were led by Francis H. Taylor, who had been appointed director of The Met in 1940, Horace H. F. Jayne, vice director, and Preston Remington, curator of the Department of Renaissance and Modern Art. An initial inventory, signed by Remington and dated September 17, 1943, notes among the other significant works of art under consideration: "1) the stonework of the patio, including all stone elements in the adjoining corridors and staircases which originally belonged to the patio . . . 2) the curved wood ceiling of the patio proper and of the galleries surrounding it . . . 3) the patio fountain, and any antique stone elements such



as portrait roundels, coats-of-arms, etc. incorporated in the patio and adjoining galleries, but not originally part of it.”¹⁵ The furniture and works of art not chosen by the Museum’s staff were entrusted to art dealers French & Company, to be sold on the international market.¹⁶

As incoming director, Taylor set an expansionist mandate. The future of the Blumenthal mansion and its collection was under consideration during the same time that the “new” Metropolitan Museum was being planned. The intention was to enlarge the Museum and bring coherence to the overall architectural appearance and internal layout of a complex of buildings that spanned more than seventy years and that had been designed and constructed in various styles by Calvert Vaux, Jacob Wrey Mould, Richard Morris Hunt, Richard Howland Hunt, and the firm McKim, Mead, and White (among others).¹⁷ The Met courted major gifts with the promise of new galleries. An impressive model of the project was placed on display in the Great Hall in 1945, when it seemed that Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney’s collection might come to the Museum if a wing were built to house it.¹⁸ This must have seemed a favorable moment to consider the fate of the Vélez Blanco patio, one of the most important and largest showpieces from Blumenthal’s vast bequest that, based on the consistency and quality of its works, distinguished itself as one of the notable additions to The Met’s collection in the history of the Museum.¹⁹

The inventory drawn up by Remington in September 1943 was shared at the beginning of 1944 with Benjamin W. Morris, the architect in charge of The Met’s expansion.²⁰ The firm’s youngest architects, Robert B. O’Connor and Aymar Embury II, were tasked with finding a way to accommodate “those built-in elements” considered to be of interest, among which was the patio. The architects defined the patio’s “architectural interest” in practical terms, determining that it should be “built into a court” as “a very helpful feature . . . open to the sky.” As such, the patio would provide “psychological relief,” and a “desirable and attractive oasis for the weary visitor.”²¹ Their proposal treated the patio as a form of distinguished decoration and ignored the work’s importance as an architectural monument in its own right and with its own history. It is no coincidence that in a letter from January 25, 1944, to Taylor, O’Connor was determined to discuss the patio’s destination “without arguing [its] archeological value.”²² His words leave no doubt as to the firm’s intent to display the patio as it had been in Blumenthal’s home, using it once again as a picturesque architectural backdrop.

The marble blocks were packed and transported to The Met in summer 1945 and were temporarily stored in the “court space west of the Boiler House.”²³ Between November 1945 and January 1946, the curators of the Department of Renaissance and Modern Art—first and foremost Preston Remington—were still gathering information about the construction of the patio in the Blumenthal house in order to facilitate its eventual reconstruction in the Museum. However, the plan for the renovation advocated by Taylor involved a fund-raising campaign in honor of the Museum’s 75th anniversary. When the campaign failed to secure the necessary funds, the director and the Trustees were forced to modify their initial aspirations. The building project, redeveloped between 1948 and 1950, became one of modernizing the preexisting wings and no longer included the creation of a new space for the installation of the Vélez Blanco patio.²⁴ As Taylor’s ideas about the future of The Met were being drastically scaled down, conceptions about the patio’s fate began to extend beyond the Museum, first with ideas related to its potential relocation in Washington, DC, and eventually in Cuba.

TOWARD THE MUSEO NACIONAL DE BELLAS ARTES, HAVANA

In a letter to Taylor dated July 9, 1948, from Harbeson, Hough, Livingston & Larson—an architectural firm based in Philadelphia—William Manger, assistant director of the Pan-American Union (PAU), inquired whether the patio might be available for installation in “one of the buildings in Washington of the Union,” most likely the administrative building that was under construction and recently assigned to the firm.²⁵ Significantly, the principal Organization of American States (OAS) headquarters on Constitution Avenue, inaugurated in 1910 and designed by Paul Cret and Albert Kelsey, included an internal courtyard (fig. 5) that clearly alluded to North American stereotypes of colonial architectural traditions in the Caribbean and South America.²⁶ The courtyard also paid symbolic tribute to the mission of the organization, which had been founded in 1890 to bridge the north and south of the continent in a network of cultural and commercial solidarity under the guiding influence of the United States.²⁷ The political and cultural benefits to be gained by the Pan-American Union’s initiative must have caught the attention of the Museum’s administration. Taylor’s response supplying the requested material and verifying the feasibility of the proposal was rapid. However, in less than a month, it became clear that the Pan-American Union’s proposal was not viable, due to

fig. 5 Paul Cret (French, 1876–1945) and Albert Kelsey (American, 1870–1950). Patio of the Pan-American Union Main Building, Washington, DC, 1910

fig. 6 Evelio Govantes (Cuban, 1886–1982) and Félix Cabarrocas (Cuban, 1887–1961), updated by Manuel Febles Valdés. *Projects for the Museo de Bellas Artes*, 1925–48/49

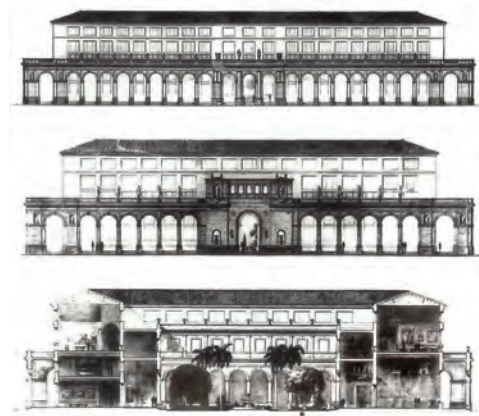
“limitations of both space and funds.”²⁸ The failed episode became an important precedent for considering the patio as a politically significant diplomatic gift to a nation located in the Southern Hemisphere.

The question of the patio’s fate was reopened when Taylor was invited to Cuba at the end of 1948 by Antonio Rodríguez Morey, a painter and important Havana intellectual. Born in Cádiz, Spain, in 1871, Morey moved at a young age with his family to Cuba and trained in the Escuela de Pintura y Escultura de San Alejandro in Havana. In 1912, after having visited Europe and sojourned in Rome during the 1890s, he was appointed a teacher at the school in which he had studied and became increasingly involved in the intellectual milieu of the Cuban capital. He was a key member of many institutions, from the Academia Nacional de Artes y Letras to the Corporación de Bibliotecarios, Archiveros y Conservadores de Museos del Caribe.²⁹ In 1918, Morey was appointed director of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, inaugurated on April 28, 1913, and he held the post for almost fifty years. From this official position of cultural preeminence, Morey sought to realize his dream of providing Havana with an adequate building for the art collections of the Museo Nacional, which were then displayed at no. 108 Calle Aguilar in galleries considered indecorous and inappropriate.³⁰ Promises made by Ramón Grau San Martín, the outgoing president of the Republic, and Carlos Prío Socarrás of the Partido Auténtico, elected president in October 1948, offered Morey a new starting point.

When the project for a modern building again was proposed during these months, it was entrusted to Manuel Febles Valdés, former head of urbanism for the Grau San Martín government and minister of public works under Prío Socarrás. Febles Valdés intended to

update the project presented in 1925 by the architects Evelio Govantes and Félix Cabarrocas readapting the old Mercado de Colón, built between 1882 and 1884. This plan would have preserved the portico structure in the Plaza del Polvorín by transforming it into the ground level for a new second floor designed in a mélange of Beaux-Arts and Deco styles that conformed to architectural tendencies widespread in Havana at the time (fig. 6).³¹ Morey bolstered his contacts with foreign mediators, including Taylor, in order to augment the repertoire of works that would be displayed in the new structure.³² Not coincidentally, according to an article in the magazine *Carteles*, one of Morey’s collaborators had been sent to Paris to the meeting organized by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) between June 28 and July 3, 1948, and had presented Govantes and Cabarrocas’s design, measuring it against other international proposals for museums.³³

The extent to which the United States dedicated attention to Cuban art during those years cannot be





overestimated.³⁴ The government's interest expressed a precise policy of cultural influence, ratified in 1933 by Franklin D. Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy, that supported a long-standing imperialist strategy with its roots in the 1898 victory of the United States in the Spanish-American War. An example of this policy at work is the exhibition "Modern Cuban Painters" that opened in March 1944 at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York and was organized by Alfred H. Barr Jr. in collaboration with the Cuban intellectual and art critic José Gómez-Sicre following Barr's visit to the island in August 1942.³⁵ A reduced selection of the works presented in New York subsequently toured U.S. cities, Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Port au Prince, Haiti. Similar political intentions animated the promotion of Cuban art by the PAU Visual Arts Unit, directed since 1946 by Gómez-Sicre.³⁶ In the period following World War II, the organization dedicated several exhibitions to South American and Caribbean artists such as Felipe Orlando, Cundo Bermúdez, and René Portocarrero. The program adhered to international trends of Modernism, and its preference for abstraction encouraged Gómez-Sicre to favor the Cuban *vanguardia* over Mexican muralism.³⁷

The dynamics of cultural imperialism led by the U.S. government and the PAU Visual Arts Unit under the label of pan-Americanism are also seen at work in the exhibition "32 Artistas de las Américas," presented in 1948 in Panama, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, and Chile (renamed "33 Artistas" for the second leg of the tour in Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras in 1949).

fig. 7 Caricatures from the newspaper *Información*, sent by assistants of Antonio Rodríguez Morey in Havana to Francis H. Taylor, March 1949. MMA Archives

The show merits attention because, for the first time, Gómez-Sicre developed a strategy anticipating the dynamics that would be set in motion by Taylor's offer of the Vélez Blanco patio to the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Havana. Under the aegis of the U.S. government and PAU, Gómez-Sicre's new strategy aimed at presenting South American and Caribbean artists in their home countries together with North American counterparts (in this case Stuart Davis, Arthur Dove, and Karl Zerbe). The new program was based on the concept of cultural importation rather than exportation and sought to connect native artists to sources of U.S. patronage. Loans were selected exclusively from U.S. collections (in particular MoMA). The show and the tour were supported by major multinational companies with South American interests, such as Grace Line and the United Fruit Company. The countries selected for the tour are also telling. Gómez-Sicre and the PAU targeted governments undergoing political consolidation, leaving aside established democracies such as Mexico or Brazil. The location for the Havana exhibition, which opened between August and September 1949, was strategically chosen. The Lyceum and Lawn Tennis Club was a prestigious cultural venue frequented by the capital's bourgeoisie who shared the platform of modernizing liberalism promoted by President Prío Socarrás and his pro-U.S. government.³⁸

Upon his arrival in Havana in January 1949, with The Met's plans in hand for Morey's consultation, Taylor participated in an informal conversation at the Lyceum Club. The event was sponsored by the Patronato Pro Museo Nacional, a foundation dedicated to raising the funds to build the new museum for the Cuban art collections.³⁹ Evidence of this meeting can be found in caricatures that appeared in the periodical *Información* and that were sent to Taylor by Morey's assistants in March (fig. 7). Some months later, Morey followed up on his discussion with Taylor by writing a cordial letter in which he firmly sought a donation "for the Museum, the structure of a courtyard, belonging to an old Spanish palace," that is, the patio of Vélez Blanco, an offer informally anticipated by his American colleague.⁴⁰ Granting the request would have fulfilled the distinct and shared needs of the directors and the institutions they represented. The Cuban art collections and the unbuilt National Museum would have been immeasurably enhanced with the addition of the Vélez Blanco patio. Donating the patio would have provided the solution to the Metropolitan Museum's inability to find adequate space for its installation in New York.⁴¹ Most importantly for both institutions, the gift symbolically would have reinforced the

strengthening political relationship between the United States and Cuba on the international stage.

The geopolitical background to Taylor's meeting with Morey and the resultant request for the patio was set in place in December 1948 when Cuban president Prío Socarrás was received in Washington, DC, by Harry S. Truman. His trip was intended to endorse Cuba's political allegiance to the American administration that reinforced American control over the island nation.⁴² That same month, the Cuban president signed the Rio Treaty, or Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, which gave cover to U.S. military intervention in the Southern Hemisphere.⁴³ In his October 10, 1948, message to the Congreso de la República, Prío Socarrás made reference to the future foreign policy of his new government. He stated his intention to fight against dictatorships and "on the side of democracy,"⁴⁴ a phrase interpreted by the officers of the U.S. Embassy in Havana as an unexpected pro-Washington, DC, statement in the very first days of his term of office,⁴⁵ as a declaration of "anti-communism," and as an expression of "active sympathy for those fighting 'dictatorial' regimes."⁴⁶

Plans for Havana's National Museum kept pace with these political events. In its May 1948 issue, *Carteles* featured the construction of the new modern building above the monumental arcades and central courtyard of the old Mercado de Colón. The design symbolically integrated the island's colonial heritage with the prestigious contemporary style associated with Havana's ambitious urban development.⁴⁷ According to *Arquitectura*, the journal of the Colegio de Arquitectos in Cuba, the plan incorporating the old Mercado was intended "to take advantage of the magnificent conditions of a tropical and classic building that the city had," especially enhancing its "beautiful patio with its gardens, an open-air museum where sculpture could find its own element, [a] Havana patio lined with arcades."⁴⁸

Including the marbles from Vélez Blanco in the structure in progress gained rapid support from the minister of education in the Prío Socarrás government, Aureliano Sánchez Arango. Following the logic of the museum's symbolism, which combined existing architectural traditions with the new, the patio's acquisition could even be deemed necessary. Already by 1947, *Carteles* had published an interview with Jesús Casagrán Safont, the sculptor assigned as project manager, who, under the presidency of Grau San Martín, had affirmed that the museum would need to function not only as the "engine and the center of the country's

cultural movement in its most specific aspect," but also as "the clearest and most vivid witness of our love for the sister nations of America."⁴⁹ In this context, the patio would have evoked Cuba's Spanish colonial past with its strength in form and tradition, according to a cultural perspective mirrored in other Latin American institutions (for example, the Museo de Artes Plásticas, Mexico City).⁵⁰ At the same time, the U.S. gift would have represented the northward shift of the continental axis and the interest of Washington, DC, in nations formerly under Spanish dominion.

These same themes underscored the exhibition "La pintura colonial en Cuba" that had been presented during spring 1950 in the Capitolio Nacional in Havana. The show, acclaimed by critics and a popular success, was linked to the rebirth of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes as a brand-new showcase for contemporary Cuban art, as well as for the venerable collections that represented the island's artistic and cultural heritage. The designer and architect Rafael Marquina stated: "One of the countless consequences of this great exhibition is a vigorous plea in favor of a national museum. The Patronato Pro Museo [among the organizers of the event] has been able to use a good argument in favor of this sake."⁵¹

Despite widespread consensus about the need for a renovated museum and the numerous public demonstrations in support of the building project, such as the one that took place in October 1949 in front of the presidential palace in Havana, construction was forced to cease in the late 1940s due to a chronic lack of funds.⁵² Consequently, negotiations with The Met came to a halt. All the same, the request for the Vélez Blanco patio was not forgotten. Cuban authorities proposed it again during the subsequent phase of the museum's construction in the 1950s, which was very different from that of the previous decade. In 1949–50, when Alfonso Rodríguez Pichardo assumed leadership as the *arquitecto notable* of the Ministry for Public Works, the building project, supported with fresh resources, radically changed direction.⁵³ Pichardo drafted a completely new, ambitious design that was inspired by the functional lexicon of the Modernist movement, an architectural language that was changing the face of Havana. Buildings like the Cabaret Tropicana by Max Borges Jr. and the U.S. Embassy by Harrison & Abramovitz were giving Havana a so-called international appearance modeled after U.S. southern cities,⁵⁴ while many other important U.S. firms and prominent architects recently settled in North America, such as Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, also were active in the city.⁵⁵

fig. 8 Photograph showing the proposed location for the Vélez Blanco patio for the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, 1950s (view from first floor). Enclosed in the letter from José A. Mendigutía to Francis H. Taylor, June 6, 1952, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives

fig. 9 Photograph showing the proposed location for the Vélez Blanco patio for the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana, 1950s (view from second floor). Enclosed in the letter from José A. Mendigutía to Francis H. Taylor, June 6, 1952, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives

Pichardo was immediately sent to New York with an introduction by Morey to Taylor, dated October 11, 1950, in order to study “the lighting of the rooms” of The Met.⁵⁶ The museum’s construction in Havana was accelerated, so that on the night of December 11, 1951, the buildings of the Mercado de Colón, which had undergone extensive consolidation, were demolished without any warning. The destruction led to outrage on the part of the local intelligentsia, in particular those of the journal *Arquitectura*.⁵⁷ The journal spearheaded a significant media campaign and gave space to controversial pieces like a memorable article by José María Bens Arrarte that openly opposed the government’s actions.⁵⁸ Arrarte, an esteemed professional and member of the Academia Nacional de Artes y Letras, emphasized that when the new project was originally drafted for the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, institutions with notable international prestige such as the Academia had been consulted neither by the ministry nor by Pichardo, who in those years was scorned by the Cuban association of professional architects.⁵⁹

The Vélez Blanco patio reentered the newly embittered debate surrounding the construction of the museum. Pichardo in the weeks following his visit to New York received assurances that The Met was seriously considering the matter.⁶⁰ At the same time, however, he felt obliged to remind Taylor of the extent to which the Ministry for Public Works was pressing to obtain a masterpiece “about which a great propaganda

has been made in Cuba, as a valuable donation by the City of New York.”⁶¹ On February 8, 1952, Cuban president Prío Socarrás sought out Mayor Vincent R. Impellitteri to put pressure on The Met’s Board of Trustees.⁶² But that March, Cuba was rocked by the coup d’état led by Fulgencio Batista, who was keen for U.S. support to establish a military dictatorship.⁶³ On April 28, Pichardo wrote to Taylor with impeccable aplomb: “unfortunately, unpredicted circumstances prevented our plans.”⁶⁴

The Met’s governance had been concerned about the negotiations prior to the coup d’état. A memorandum of March 17, 1952, indicates that Taylor did not want to address the Cuban matter with the Board that day, noting as the justification the “Political situation in Cuba!!”⁶⁵ To reassure his New York associates that construction would continue, Pichardo, in his April 28 letter alluding to the coup, promised photographs charting the progress of the patio’s intended site. These images were sent to The Met in June by the newly elected minister of public works, José A. Mendigutía, to demonstrate how an “appropriate and covered place, according to the structure and dimensions” of the patio, was being built (figs. 8, 9).⁶⁶ The patio’s intended location is significant in itself: the photos apparently show the monumental vestibule of the museum, later decorated with a mosaic by Enrique Caravia symbolizing the history of global civilization. From this central position, the patio

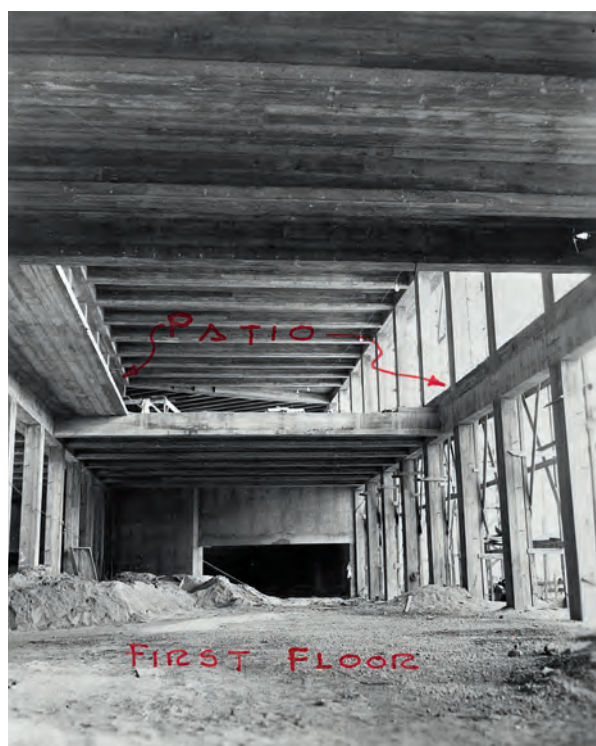




fig. 10 Alfonso Rodríguez Pichardo (Cuban, 1918–1980). Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1950–54, Havana, Trocadero. Photograph, 1950–54. Archivo Centro de Información, MNBA

fig. 11 Alfonso Rodríguez Pichardo. Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, 1950–54, Havana, Trocadero. View of the inner patio. Photograph, 1954. Archivo Centro de Información, MNBA

would have welcomed visitors, introduced them to the national collections housed in the museum, and served as a monumental threshold to the history of the whole island.

The inauguration of the new building was planned for the opening of the second Bienal Hispanoamericana de Arte in May 1954. Museum galleries were intended to display works largely from Francoist Spain, a controversial choice for the Cuban intelligentsia.⁶⁷ In the meantime, various Cuban artists such as Rita Longa, Juan José Sicre, and Enrique Caravia also had been commissioned to create permanent works of art in the modern style to adorn the museum.⁶⁸ Finally, near the colonial center of the city, the compact Modernist building (fig. 10) would have appeared divorced from the surrounding traditional architecture. Although the project was appreciated by some intellectuals, it mainly provoked widespread hostility.⁶⁹ Tellingly, even though the museum won the main prize in architecture at the Bienal, Pichardo failed to receive the award for the best building of 1954 from the local Colegio de Arquitectos.⁷⁰

Pichardo defended his design. In a manuscript kept in the archives of the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, he argued that “Cuban architectural colonial tradition” had been aligned to the new building’s progressive structure. In his peroration, the architect specifically mentioned “the large central patio as well as the high struts and the firm cubic appearance . . . [that are] characteristic of the Creole architecture”⁷¹ (fig. 11). By linking the style of the central modern courtyard to the Creole tradition, Pichardo responded to the public *lamentatio* about the loss of the colonial market and justified the insertion of his Modernist building into the fabric of the old city. His comments also demonstrate the persistence of the earlier plan’s architectural symbolism. In Pichardo’s idea, the central patio on the museum’s ground floor, which had been adorned by an Ernesto Navarro frieze, would have substituted for the old Mercado’s arcaded courtyard. The whole architectural design and selection of permanent artistic works created to decorate the new building similarly would have evoked Cuba’s historical circle.⁷²

The motif of a courtyard, surrounded by arcades or galleries, had assumed a particular value in the Cuban Modernist tradition that is consistent with the claims, assertions, and theoretical arguments that Pichardo raised in defense of his design. Civil and residential structures built between the late 1930s and 1950s such as the Eutimio Falla Bonet House by Eugenio Batista, completed in 1939; the Isabel and Olga Pérez Farfante residence by Frank Martínez and the Félix Carvajal

House by Mario Romanach, both raised about 1955; and the famous Eugenio Leal House, built in 1957, all include a central arcaded courtyard. The design not only provided a practical getaway from the tropical climate, but also a relevant traditional theme for twentieth-century reinterpretations.⁷³

As a strong, metaphorical symbol of Cuba's historical, "Spanish" past, the patio of Vélez Blanco might also have alluded to the controversy among avant-garde groups of the *habanera* scene during the 1940s. In general, the faction gathered around the Galería del Prado (led by Gómez-Sicre since 1942) favored the broad concept of pan-Americanism, while the editorial staff of the magazine *Orígenes* supported the European Modernist movement (under the guidance of the poet and novelist José Lezama Lima). However, at a time when the island was renegotiating its own international position, each faction agreed on the paramount importance of the unique cultural genesis of the Cuban spirit (*cubanía*). The gift of the patio by the United States to the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes could have symbolically mediated this intellectual rift by reinserting a shared heritage in the triumphant line of modernity.⁷⁴

Subsequently, the pressures from Cuba on Taylor and the Board at The Met continued well into 1952. However, toward the end of the year, negotiations met unexpected resistance from certain trustees who, adhering to a more restrictive interpretation of Blumenthal's will, were determined to keep the marbles in the United States.⁷⁵ Matters abruptly were closed with a letter of December 4, 1952, from the Secretary of the Board Dudley T. Easby Jr. to the minister of public works of Havana that stated the Board would not concede the patio.⁷⁶ The decision, reached at a meeting on November 17, 1952, is summarized in Roland L. Redmond's message of the following day to the powerful Robert Moses, Mayor Impellitteri's right-hand man:

The Trustees concluded that there was no practical chance to incorporate the patio in the [Met] Museum's buildings. They likewise felt that it should not be stored indefinitely. Therefore they directed the staff to see whether an offer for the patio could be secured from some other public institution where it can be shown safely and appropriately. . . . The Board was strongly in favor of retaining the patio in the United States and the director was asked to terminate any negotiations with the museum in Havana, Cuba.⁷⁷

Such tension reflects deeper conflict in the Museum's executive body, specifically Taylor and his management.⁷⁸ From the documents, Easby emerges as a

mediator between those who were opposed to giving the patio to Havana and Taylor and president Roland L. Redmond, who favored the gift. The Board's dissent, however, was so solid and decisive that in the end Cuba was denied the patio.

Another layer of complexity had been added to the negotiations during the previous summer. While discussions with the Cuban authorities were still ongoing, New York's Parks Department (traditionally represented on the Board) had turned to Redmond at the behest of Moses.⁷⁹ Moses had suggested that efforts to donate the Vélez Blanco patio be redirected toward Puerto Rico, "the most Spanish part of the Caribbean,"⁸⁰ adding:

Moreover, the suggestion I made is one which would attract widespread favorable comment. Puerto Rico . . . is part of the United States. It has genuinely Spanish traditions. . . . The Puerto Ricans are enormously sensitive about things of this kind and their gratitude for recognition is out of all proportions to the dollar value of the gesture. A gift of this kind might attract great attention throughout the entire Spanish speaking world south of us. We do a great deal of talking about spreading culture, education in the arts, sharing our treasures, and about happier hemisphere relations. Here is an opportunity to do something about it.⁸¹

In the numerous messages between Moses, Redmond, and the administration, the commissioner did not seem to consider the possibility of a refusal. Instead, confident about being supported, he went so far as to indicate possible locations such as Fort El Morro in San Juan.⁸² Impellitteri signed an endorsement that was sent to Redmond in October of that year.⁸³ However, during the November meeting the Board decided to turn down even this proposal, once again appealing to a restrictive interpretation of Blumenthal's will. Moses's sharp reply leaves no doubt about the political importance he attributed to the entire enterprise, and it underscores once again the diplomatic relevance of the negotiations: "Let me express my astonishment at the belated information furnished us . . . on the suggested gift of the Blumenthal patio. I am not going to argue a question of law. . . . The matter seems to me to be strictly one of policy."⁸⁴

FINAL INSTALLATION AT THE MET

The Vélez Blanco patio thus remained at The Met. After having been for such a long time at the center of political attention, it would find a place in the history of art. In the second half of the 1950s, Olga Raggio, assistant curator in the Department of Renaissance and

Modern Art, began the archival and on-site research in Spain that would lead to her seminal *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* article on the patio's history that guided its subsequent reconstruction.⁸⁵ Raggio's research was initiated for pragmatic rather than for purely scholarly reasons. By the mid-1950s a location for the patio in The Met was being planned. How much this decision to display the architectural monument had been based on a desire to end the risk of future high-level diplomatic claims for the work remains an open question.

The space required to present the Vélez Blanco patio inside The Met's Fifth Avenue building was integrated into the restoration plans entrusted to the architectural firm Brown, Lawford and Forbes in January 1954. The project focused on providing a new vision for the open areas between the wings of the old building.⁸⁶ The gallery created for the patio's display was intended to serve as the main entrance to the new library (inaugurated in January 1965). According to a brochure published during the patio's reconstruction, the space was also envisioned to be a venue for concerts and gatherings, and a pleasant, restful area that included a fountain, benches, and flourishing vegetation.⁸⁷ The construction of the Vélez Blanco patio at The Met depended on Raggio's research, but it was never intended or understood to be an accurate reconstruction of the original patio. It even was known at the time as the "Blumenthal courtyard," a name that echoes its more recent history as a central gathering space in a New York mansion.⁸⁸

The rebuilding of the patio at The Met was the fruit of thoughtful compromise. The magnificent marble elements originally had been designed to mask the asymmetrical plan of the existing courtyard in the sixteenth-century Spanish Castle of Vélez Blanco.⁸⁹

At The Met, adjustments were made to accommodate the architectural fragments into the regular plan of a contemporary building. Efforts also were made to ensure the patio's completeness. The Met attempted to acquire portions of the castle that had stayed in situ (in particular the missing pieces of the upper cornice).⁹⁰ That the request—destined to fail with the ministerial bodies in Madrid—was made at all was likely possible because of the recent reintegration of Francoist Spain with the international community (ending with the accession of Spain to the United Nations in 1955).

Contemporary documents about the reconstruction provide accounts of mediated integrations and cautious substitutions, along with well-considered decisions about the addition of complementary elements such as the ceiling and the flooring. The aim was to carefully insert the patio into the space conceived to host it.⁹¹ Today it is difficult to evaluate the scale of the operations entrusted to the architects.⁹² However, visual evidence of the effort placed on rethinking the patio inside a museum while maintaining the work's artistic integrity can be found in an illustration included in the brochure. Here, the firm Brown, Lawford and Forbes demonstrates the adaptability of the patio to the covered courtyard in front of the library (fig. 12).

The report sent by Raggio to Met director James J. Rorimer on June 8, 1960, explains: "our installation project would seem to be more correctly described as a re-adaptation of the Vélez architectural elements rather than as a strict architectural reconstruction. . . . Seen as a gallery, simply suggestive of a Spanish Renaissance *Patio*, the Museum's installation project appears as a harmonious and attractive area."⁹³ The inclusion of the Vélez Blanco patio in the Museum changed the mid-twentieth-century perception of the work from a geopolitical Cold War game piece to a grand element in The



fig. 12 Drawing by Brown, Lawford and Forbes for the installation of the Blumenthal Patio. Metropolitan Museum [1962], unpaginated

Met's encyclopedic project. The patio's "Spanishness," once removed from current political events, slowly came to be appreciated in the context of the wider history of art. Embraced within the Museum's canon, it became a rich subject for the speculations and inquiries of scholars. Nevertheless its complex provenance—spread across various continents through three-quarters of the twentieth century—raises for modern viewers important questions around the shifting values attributed to works of art by different epochs and about different political and cultural perspectives that can affect the gaze of a whole community of viewers.

NOTES

- 1 As quoted in Kent 2019, 22. Beals 1933.
- 2 See, for example, Martínez 1994, especially 50–94.
- 3 Sánchez Ramos 2007, 36–46.
- 4 Ruiz García 1999, 43–62; Sánchez Ramos 2007, 44–53, 57–60.
- 5 Lentisco Puche and Roth 2009, 8–29.
- 6 Palanques Ayén 1904a.
- 7 Palanques Ayén 1904b. See also Lentisco Puche 1999, 98–104.
- 8 See Merino de Cáceres and Martínez Ruiz 2012; Reist and Colomer 2012; Jiménez-Blanco 2017; and Kagan 2019. On the sale of the patio, see Mozzati 2019; Mozzati 2020a; and Mozzati 2020b.
- 9 See Patterson 1930; Seligman 1961, 142–45; Kathrens 2005, 294–304; and Cleland 2015, 150, 158n15. On the installation of the patio in the house, see Hietikko 2017 and Mozzati 2020b.
- 10 For details about the construction, see Mozzati 2019; for photographs, see Hewitt 1928.
- 11 Motos Díaz 2014; see also Mozzati 2021.
- 12 Gebhard 1967.
- 13 See "Principal and Income Transactions Relating to the Sale of the Blumenthal Property at 50 East 70th Street, Bequeathed to the Museum under the Will of George Blumenthal," memorandum by J. Kenneth Loughry to Francis H. Taylor, March 24, 1945, Office of the Secretary, Correspondence Files, 1870–1950, Blumenthal George, Bequest – Patio (and Pipe Organ) 1952, 1954, 1963–64 (hereafter cited as Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence), MMA Archives.
- 14 Blumenthal's will also specified which parts of his house should be transferred to the Museum; see the memorandum to the Board of Trustees, November 1, 1952, Francis H. Taylor Records, National Museum (Cuba), Secretary's File, 1948–53, MMA Archives. See also the memorandum by Loughry to Taylor, March 24, 1945, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1952, 1954, 1963–64, MMA Archives.
- 15 See, with further documentation, Preston Remington, Inventory, September 17, 1943, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives. On the ceiling, see Motos Díaz 2018, 204–5.
- 16 See letters from L. Harrison to Taylor, May 15, 1944, and Harrison to John J. Wallace and Preston Remington, April 5, 1945; Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives. On this sale, see Motos Díaz 2018, 204–5.

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- 17 Heckscher 1995, 30–53.
- 18 Ibid., 59–63.
- 19 Taylor 1941, 193, 195–98.
- 20 Memorandum signed by Remington, September 17, 1943, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 21 O'Connor to Taylor, January 25, 1944, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 See letter to John J. Wallace, February 15, 1945; see also Harrison to Wallace and Remington, April 5, 1945; both Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 24 Heckscher 1995, 62–63.
- 25 Harbeson, Hough, Livingston & Larson, Architects, to Taylor, July 9, 1948, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 26 White 1973.
- 27 For a useful summary of the relations between the United States and the Caribbean, see Randall 1997, 51–83.
- 28 Harbeson, Hough, Livingston & Larson, Architects, to John Goldsmith Phillips, July 19, 1948, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 29 See Matamoros and Rippe Moro 2001, 10; and Matamoros 2014, 27–28.
- 30 See Museo Nacional de Cuba 1955, s.v. "Palacio de Bellas Artes – El Museo Nacional – Habana"; Museo Nacional de Cuba 1978, 6–7; Matamoros and Rippe Moro 2001, 9–11; Rippe 2001, 11–14; Linares Ferrera 2003, 32–34; Laguna Enrique 2013, 65–211; Matamoros 2014, 27–29; and Alonso González 2016, 19–33.
- 31 Linares Ferrera 2003, 40–41. On Febles Valdés's activity as "director de urbanismo," see *Arquitectura* 1948 and Linares Ferrera 2003, 34–37.
- 32 Morey to Taylor, October 19, 1948, Francis H. Taylor Records, National Museum (Cuba), Secretary's File, 1948–53, MMA Archives.
- 33 Maribona 1948, 14–15.
- 34 See Smith 1960; Franklin 1997, 1–17; Morales Domínguez and Prevost 2008, 21–35.

- 35 Barr 1944. See Florio 2009a and 2009b. See also McEwen 2016, 120–21.
- 36 Fox 2013, 3–4.
- 37 See Wellen 2012. See also McEwen 2016, 120–21.
- 38 Fox 2013, 116–22.
- 39 On the Lyceum and Lawn Tennis Club, see McEwen 2016, 63, 68–78. On the Patronato Pro Museo Nacional, founded in 1926, see Rippe 2001, 14–15; Matamoros 2014, 28–29; and Alonso González 2016, 49–58.
- 40 Morey to Taylor, August 22, 1949, Francis H. Taylor Records, National Museum (Cuba), Secretary's File, 1948–53, MMA Archives.
- 41 The deaccession had already been discussed in a letter from Taylor to William H. Parker, Harbeson, Hough, Livingston & Larson, July 12, 1948, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 42 Morales Domínguez and Prevost 2008, 34.
- 43 Franklin 1997, 15.
- 44 “Cuba ha tomado posición en el complejo panorama mundial situándose con toda entereza junto a la democracia y frente a las dictaduras de todo tipo . . .” Prío Socarrás 1948, 4.
- 45 Office Memorandum from Mr. Mackay to Mr. Price, Mr. Walker, Mr. Woodward, October 28, 1948, Cuba Internal and Foreign Affairs, Confidential US State Department Central Files (hereafter cited as CUSSDCF), <https://www.latinamericanstudies.org/embassy/R7-Memo-10-28-1948.pdf>.
- 46 Office Memorandum from Mr. Mackay to Mr. Walker, Mr. Woodward, Mr. Daniels, September 9, 1948, Cuba Internal and Foreign Affairs, CUSSDCF (<https://www.latinamericanstudies.org/embassy/R6-Memo-9-9-1948.pdf>); see also US Embassy, Despatch 810, October 1, 1948, Cuba Internal and Foreign Affairs, CUSSDCF (<https://www.latinamericanstudies.org/embassy/R6-810-10-1-1948.pdf>).
- 47 *Carteles* 1948, 42–43. For the building works on the Mercado de Colón, see Linares Ferrera 2003, 38–39.
- 48 Bens Arrarte 1951, 540–42.
- 49 De Pozadelas 1947, 20–21.
- 50 Garduño 2018.
- 51 Marquina 1950. See also Maribona 1950 and Pogolotti 1950.
- 52 Alonso González 2016, 54–55. *Carteles* (30, no. 40 [October 2, 1949]: 64) anticipates the programmatic text written for the event.
- 53 Arroyo 1956, 4.
- 54 Rodríguez 1998, 192–205.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 236–67.
- 56 Morey to Taylor, October 11, 1950, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 57 Linares Ferrera 2003, 40–42.
- 58 Bens Arrarte 1951; see also Martí del Castillo 1952.
- 59 See note 71 below.
- 60 John Goldsmith Phillips to Pichardo, January 19, 1951, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 61 Pichardo to Taylor, April 28, 1952, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 62 Prío Socarrás to Impellitteri, February 8, 1952, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 63 On the coup d'état of Batista and his relations with the U.S. administration, see Cirules 2015, 74–88.
- 64 Pichardo to Taylor, April 28, 1952, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 65 Memorandum, March 17, 1952, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 66 Mendigutía to Taylor, June 6, 1952; Raúl Hermida Antorcha to Taylor, June 24, 1952; both Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 67 McEwen 2016, 79–81, 98–102.
- 68 Linares Ferrera 2003, 50–53. See also Caravia 1954, 403–8.
- 69 Carpentier 1993, 213–14. For examples of critical articles, see Jorge Mañach's “Un monumento a la telaraña” (1955) and Carmelo González’ “Árbol que nace torcido” (1955); reprinted in Merino Acosta 2015, 2:353–55, 379–81.
- 70 Del Castillo 1954, 117. Pichardo, on the basis of this success, would have traveled to Europe to “study the different techniques of museographic installation”; *Goya* 1954, 126. *Arquitectura* 1955, 7–13. Significantly, Pichardo is not highlighted by the magazine *Arquitectura* in the commentary describing the Cuban architecture exhibition that opened in New York on October 5, 1954; see *Arquitectura* 1954.
- 71 “la tradición cubana colonial”; “el gran patio central así como los altos puntales y la firme apariencia cúbica . . . han sido . . . características . . . de la arquitectura criolla”; quoted by Linares Ferrera 2003, 44–46.
- 72 On the ideological project translated by the architectural structure of the museum, see Elliott 2018.
- 73 Rodríguez 1998, 240–41, 253–56, 279–83, 302–3.
- 74 Anreus 2011.
- 75 Their resistance was strengthened following a \$10,000 cost to transfer the crates to storage space in the Museum's tunnels; see letter from Taylor to Aureliano Sánchez Arango, February 13, 1952; letter from Taylor to Impellitteri, March 10, 1952; letter from Dudley T. Easby Jr. to Mendigutía, June 20, 1952; and the memorandum to Easby, October 29, 1952; all Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 76 Easby to Mendigutía, December 4, 1952, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 77 Letter from Redmond to Moses, November 18, 1952, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives. For more on Moses, see Caro 1974. On the mandate of Impellitteri, see LaGumina 1992. Interestingly, during this negotiation, the Board turned to the opinion of some merchants to establish the commercial value of the work (certainly to use this data against Taylor's proposal): the MMA archives still retain a letter by Mitchell Samuels of French & Company Inc. (“in view of its size and the difficulty of placing such a large object, I would place its value at \$ 50.000.00 to \$ 60.000.00 as an appraisal”) and one by Leslie A. Hyam, vice president of the Parke-Bernet Galleries (“there is no existing market for a monument of this size and type”); see Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 78 Tomkins 1989, 265–313.
- 79 See memorandum recording a message from Francis Cormier to Moses, July 31, 1952; memorandum recording a message from Moses to Cormier, August 1, 1952; memorandum recording a message from Cormier to Moses, August 8, 1952; letter from Albert T. Gardner to Cormier, August 14, 1952; memorandums by Gardner to Easby, August 28, 1952, and September 15, 1952; all Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 80 Letter from Moses to Redmond, September 19, 1952, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 81 Moses to Redmond, September 30, 1952, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.

- 82 Letter recording a message from Moses to Cormier, August 1, 1952, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 83 See letter on headed paper “City of New York – Office of the Mayor” from Impellitteri to Redmond, October 17, 1952; see also letter from Redmond to Impellitteri, October 20, 1952; both Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 84 Moses to Redmond, October 29, 1952, Blumenthal Bequest, correspondence, 1942–46, 1948–51, MMA Archives.
- 85 Raggio 1964. See Mozzati 2021.
- 86 Heckscher 1995, 64–65.
- 87 See Metropolitan Museum [1962]. Documents in the curatorial files of the Department of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts (ESDA) attest that the reconstruction of the patio started to be planned at the beginning of 1958, involving Olga Raggio (Blumenthal – installation-photos/notes/correspondence; ESDA Curatorial Files, 41.190.482).
- 88 Canaday 1964, 106–7.
- 89 Raggio 1964, 144, fig. 4.
- 90 Motos Díaz 2014, 51–73; see also Mozzati 2021.
- 91 See, for example, Joseph V. Noble Records, Architecture, Blumenthal patio 1963–1965: punch list, rubber stamp: September 1964, MMA Archives.
- 92 See memorandum to J. Kenneth Loughry, Arthur F. Klein, May 10, 1963, and letter from Loughry to Brown, Lawford and Forbes, March 18, 1963; both Office of the Secretary, Subject Files, Building – Reconstruction, 1963–1964, MMA Archives. Documents in The Met Archives show that during the reconstruction the original structure of the patio was integrated with new elements.
- 93 Report by Raggio to Rorimer, June 8, 1960, Blumenthal – installation-photos/notes/correspondence, ESDA Curatorial Files, 41.190.482.

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Collecting the Ancient Near East at The Met

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More than one hundred and fifty years after its founding, The Metropolitan Museum of Art is the only museum in the United States with a curatorial department solely dedicated to ancient Near Eastern art. Many U.S. museums hold objects that belong to this classification, and collections can be found at art museums such as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. They also exist in university teaching museums like the Oriental Institute Museum of the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology (Penn Museum), and the Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East¹—all with vast collections of ancient Near Eastern material culture. The Met, however, stands alone in the breadth and depth of such a collection



fig. 1 Relief panel with head of a winged supernatural figure from the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II. Neo-Assyrian, ca. 883–859 B.C., Nimrud (ancient Kalkhu). Gypsum alabaster, H. 25¼ × W. 31½ × D. 3 in. (64.1 × 80 × 7.6 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Benjamin Brewster, 1884 (84.11)

housed in a so-called encyclopedic museum, as well as a commitment to the field of ancient Near Eastern art history.² The beginnings of the collection at The Met can be situated in the first decades of the Museum's existence despite the fact that a formal Department of Ancient Near Eastern art was not created until 1956.³ The late nineteenth century also witnessed a growing U.S. interest in the ancient past of this area of the world, however it may have been called—the Near East, the lands of the Bible, the Holy Land, the Ottoman Empire, the Orient, Western Asia. The emergence of this new field of scholarship, now referred to under the umbrella term “ancient Near Eastern studies,” occurred about the same time as the foundation of The Met and its stated purpose of “encouraging and developing the study of the fine arts.”⁴ Historiographic examinations of the discipline have acknowledged the importance of antiquities collecting and museums to the endeavor but have not yet seriously considered the role of The Met and its collecting practices during this formative period.⁵ Also notable

is the near absence of discourse about the positioning of ancient Near Eastern art within the framework of the academic discipline of art history, whose study in the United States was also emerging at the time. Exploring the origins of the collection of ancient Near Eastern art at The Met will shed light on the institution as a locus for the production of knowledge about objects today categorized as ancient Near Eastern. The hierarchies that exist at present within The Met both on the institutional level and in the ancient Near Eastern collection itself can be traced in part back to this early history of collecting.

The difficult and problematic nature of the name “ancient Near East” has been the topic of much discussion and can be understood to reflect the origin story of the field of study as much as a particular location on a map and span on a timeline.⁶ While the chronological delineations vary—there is at least some consensus on “ancient” as referring to the period before the rise of Islam in the seventh century A.D.—the spatial and geographic range elicits the most confusion. The Near East

is today often comprehended as designating the region extending from modern Turkey to Afghanistan, from the Black Sea to Yemen and Oman. Sometimes it is equated with the more commonly used “Middle East,” although issues such as the absence of Egypt and the inclusion of Iran in this narrative complicate any one-to-one correspondence. As labels for the regions east of Europe, terms such as “Near East” and “Orient” reflect not only a Eurocentric perspective, but also when situated in the general time frame of antiquity have come to encompass a specific cultural area in modern scholarship. Therefore, how it was and still is received and understood cannot be separated from its function as a classification for description and analysis. The conceptual framing of the “ancient Near East” as a field of scholarship devoted to investigating its ancient material and written remains developed in the nineteenth century as a result of the uncovering of these remains and the removal of many of them to Europe.

Beginning with early nineteenth-century European travelers and government officials in the eastern regions of the Ottoman Empire, a narrative of “discovery” of ancient civilizations of the Near East highlights the exploration of key sites primarily in Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq).⁷ At the time, knowledge about the Assyrians and Babylonians of the first millennium B.C. derived from textual descriptions in non-Mesopotamian sources, principally the Bible and ancient Greek histories and geographies. Assyrian sites in the north such as Nineveh, Nimrud, and Khorsabad, and Babylonian sites in the south such as Babylon and Tello, would come to be associated with the names of European men like Austen Henry Layard, Paul-Emile Botta, Henry Rawlinson, and Ernest de Sarzec. These individuals represented the expanding British and French political interests in the region as well as a growing antiquarian study of ancient objects and monuments. As repositories of the physical remains of the ancient Near East, museums in Western Europe, foremost the British Museum in London and the Musée du Louvre in Paris, played a critical role in the reception and interpretation of Near Eastern antiquity, which involved national rivalries in the context of colonial interests. For example, the funding for the removal and transportation of these remains was framed as a competition between France and Britain as each country aimed to outmatch the other in the grandeur and quantity of finds brought back home. The primacy afforded to Mesopotamia during this formative period of collection building increases the difficulty of assessing how the more expansive definition of the Near East often in use

today might have been understood in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, as large-scale sculptural works, smaller inscribed objects, and a variety of other finds were taken from Ottoman lands and collected and acquired by Western European museums, they were also evaluated and considered through multiple lenses depending on the interests and motives of those doing the evaluating. The value of the objects could be seen through their historical, Biblical, or to a lesser degree artistic significance, or some combination of the three. As the study of art history evolved as a narrative of progressive development, Assyrian and Babylonian sculpture in particular were incorporated into existing aesthetic frameworks where their importance was founded in their perceived role as predecessors of Greek art.

This essentially European story of the “genesis” of the ancient Near East played out on a grand scale due in large part to the backdrop of empire building and the removal of great quantities of antiquities in the 1840s and 1850s, and has subsequently been the focus of much research.⁸ While the reception of Near Eastern antiquity in the United States cannot be severed completely from the European experience, it should be considered on its own terms. Differences between European nations with direct imperial ambitions in the Near East, and the United States, which kept itself politically more distant until later in the twentieth century, impacted the reception history in significant ways.⁹ The development of ancient Near Eastern studies in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century was defined by the appearance of academic journals devoted to the topic, the creation of learned societies and academic organizations, and the introduction of courses of study at U.S. universities and their eventual funding of archaeological expeditions. The history of this emerging field in the United States also reflects to a certain extent the changing nature of higher education that was concurrently taking place. It is commonly asserted that interest in the Bible supported the intellectual framework for most Near Eastern scholarship at the time.¹⁰ The role of Christianity in this narrative cannot be contested, yet different terms associated with this area of study, such as Semitic languages, Biblical archaeology, and Oriental studies, complicate the interpretation and reflect varied entry points of interest. In addition to religious motivation, language, and archaeology, the Other should also be considered in discussions of historiography. The unstable and shifting terminology suggests an element of uncertainty in how to define the scope of the field

fig. 2a Cylinder seal with modern impression. Kassite, ca. 16th–15th century B.C., Mesopotamia. Chalcedony, H. 1 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (4.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cesnola Collection, Purchased by subscription, 1874–76 (74.51.4301)

fig. 2b Loop-handled stamp seal with modern impression. Late Cypriot III(?), ca. 12th–11th century B.C.(?), Cyprus. Steatite, H. 1 in. (2.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cesnola Collection, Purchased by subscription, 1874–76 (74.51.4367)

that continues into the present day. Art as a defining criterion for the study of the ancient Near East was not normally highlighted. Yet the collecting of ancient Near Eastern material culture—essentially Mesopotamian objects—was beginning to take place in the United States, and The Met was an active participant.

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN ART AT THE MET IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

By 1890, twenty years after its founding, The Met's collection included a significant number of cuneiform inscribed clay tablets and cylinder and stamp seals—object types that today are part of the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art. Cuneiform, the writing system of ancient Mesopotamia in use from the third millennium B.C. to the first century A.D., had been deciphered in the previous decades and opened up an entirely new field of linguistic studies, frequently framed as Semitic studies.¹¹ Cuneiform tablets were especially valued as documentary records of the ancient past that sometimes had notable connections

with the Bible, as when the name of an individual such as the sixth-century B.C. ruler of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, appeared in both. Seals, on the other hand, belonged to an already much collected category of art, gemstones, which covered a long span of art history as it was then perceived.¹² In practical terms, tablets and seals also survived in large numbers and were small enough to be easily transportable and thus collectible. In the United States a smattering of tablets and seals could be found at some New England colleges, having been sent by missionaries stationed in parts of the Ottoman Empire beginning in the 1850s.¹³ The missionaries also sent back sculpted reliefs from the palaces of the first-millennium B.C. Assyrian capitals of Nimrud and Nineveh.¹⁴ While The Met owned only one fragment of an actual Assyrian relief in 1890 (fig. 1), it owned, and even more importantly, displayed plaster casts of ancient Assyrian and Babylonian sculpture made from the originals housed in the British Museum and the Louvre.

Over time The Met expanded to include seventeen curatorial departments, but in 1890 there were only three: Sculpture, Casts, and Paintings.¹⁵ Curatorial departments had been introduced a few years earlier when the entire organization of the Museum had been overhauled using the British Museum as a model, since the Museum's collection was growing and more oversight was needed. Each of the departments reported to Luigi Palma di Cesnola, The Met's first director, who held the position from 1879 to his death in 1904. A cavalry officer in the U.S. Civil War, Cesnola went on to serve as U.S. consul to Cyprus, then part of the Ottoman Empire, where he amassed a collection of more than thirty thousand antiquities dating from the Bronze Age to the end of the Roman era.¹⁶ The Met purchased the majority of this collection in stages beginning in 1874, which served as a foundational acquisition for the new museum and was in part the rationale for hiring Cesnola as its first director.¹⁷ Mesopotamian cylinder and stamp seals were part of the enormous acquisition and are the first objects that entered The Met that are today categorized as ancient Near Eastern (fig. 2a, b). In 1879, fifty clay tablets and two clay cylinders purchased from a London antiquities dealer were the first cuneiform inscribed objects to be acquired by the Museum (fig. 3a, b).¹⁸

A much larger number of tablets and seals entered the Museum in 1886 as part of a transformational acquisition of more than seven hundred objects known as the Wolfe collection or as the Ward collection. This group of objects was purchased from the Reverend





fig. 3a Clay cylinder with cuneiform inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II describing the rebuilding of the temple of the mother-goddess Ninmah/Belet-ili at Babylon. Neo-Babylonian, ca. 604–562 B.C. Probably from Babylon. $2\frac{1}{16} \times 4\frac{3}{8}$ in. (5.2 × 11.1 cm). Purchased from Joseph Mordecai Shemtob. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, 1879 (79.71)



fig. 3b Clay tablet with cuneiform inscription: proxy contract for the purchase of a slave. Neo-Babylonian, ca. 554 B.C. Probably from Babylon. $1\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{4} \times \frac{7}{8}$ in. (4.4 × 5.6 × 2.1 cm). Purchased from Joseph Mordecai Shemtob. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, 1879 (79.711)

William Hayes Ward, a self-taught “Orientalist” who at the time was also editor in chief of *The Independent*, a Congregationalist magazine based in New York. He was the leader of the Wolfe Expedition to Babylonia of 1884–85, which traveled to Mesopotamia in order to locate a site for a future U.S. archaeological expedition, and was much celebrated in the press on its return (fig. 4).¹⁹ The acquisition was described at length in *The Met’s Annual Report* in 1886:

Special attention is directed to the Babylonian and Assyrian objects, cylinders, seals, clay tablets, barrels, gold and other ornaments, bronzes, alabaster, and various objects which we have purchased from Dr. W. H. Ward.

This interesting collection was made by Dr. Ward while engaged last year in explorations in Chaldea. Through his generous desire that it should remain together, accessible to scholars in New York, he consented to transfer it to us on payment of only the actual expenses of its collection. . . .

Among its contents are upwards of 260 cylinders, which date from the earliest Chaldean periods down to that of the Assyrian monarchy. These added to the valuable series of cylinders already in the Museum, bring the whole collection up to such numbers and value that it ranks as the second museum collection in the world—that in the British Museum being first.

. . . The inscribed clay tablets and barrels which form a part of the same acquisition, are not only of general interest in connection with the cylinders as illustrations of the all-powerful art of written language, its tools and its origins, but have special interest in the fact that some of them, like an important barrel in our collections, are of the period of Nebuchadnezzar.²⁰

A range of objects was identified (fig. 5), but the importance placed on seals and tablets in the above

description is apparent. Even more striking is that the acquisition merited nearly a full-page account in the Annual Report, where acquisitions, especially purchases, in contrast to gifts, were not commonly described at all. The significance the objects held for the Museum was also reinforced when Cesnola wrote to the Trustees to recommend the acquisition: “We need scarcely say that the purchase is to be strongly recommended for every reason. Intrinsically, it is as valuable a collection as can be found . . . it is greatly desired by those who would put it in another museum of this country. Its value to the reputation of our Museum would be very great also.”²¹ Cesnola’s argument that the collection of Babylonian and Assyrian objects was in great demand by other museums and would bring value to The Met’s reputation points to both the competitive nature of collection building and the desire of positioning The Met as an important museum of its day.

Archival documentation shows that the acquisition was championed by the recently appointed curator of sculpture, Isaac H. Hall, whose department included “all the sculpture, antiquities, inscriptions, jewelry, glassware, pottery, porcelain, and such other objects of art as commonly are termed Bric-à-Brac.”²² Hall, the son of a Presbyterian minister, had become interested in Semitic languages after practicing law in New York. In 1874 he visited The Met to read the Cypriot inscriptions that were part of the recently acquired Cesnola Collection and subsequently spent two years in Beirut at the Syrian Protestant College, visiting Cyprus while there. Before his appointment at The Met in 1886, Hall was an associate editor of the *Sunday-School Times* in Philadelphia. He was also one of a number of men including Ward who met at the 1884 meeting of the American Oriental Society and the Society of Biblical Literature to discuss an expedition to Babylonia, which

fig. 4 John Henry Haynes (American, 1849–1910). Photograph from the Wolfe Expedition. Carchemish, two fragments of a single orthostat relief with inscription in hieroglyphic Luwian, 1884



fig. 5 Amulet with a Lamashtu demon. Neo-Babylonian, ca. 7th–6th century B.C., Mesopotamia. Limestone, $1\frac{1}{16} \times 2\frac{7}{16} \times \frac{9}{16}$ in. ($5 \times 6.2 \times 1.4$ cm). Purchased from the Reverend William Hayes Ward. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, 1886 (86.11.2)



would become the Wolfe Expedition.²³ Hall's association with Ward points to the existence of a small group who appear to have been connected by their interests in Semitic languages and their religious backgrounds, and who should be considered at the forefront of shaping the emerging field of ancient Near Eastern studies in the United States. Because Hall and Ward were not connected to an institution of higher education, their contributions to the developing field have been minimized in its historiographies, and by extension, the relevance of The Met and its collecting role have not been adequately considered.

In fact, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, The Met was recognized as a place to study the material remains of the ancient Near East, thus giving voice to Ward's desire for his collection to be "accessible to scholars in New York."²⁴ A notice about the publication *Babylonian Contract Tablets in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* from 1893 states: "Now that we have begun to make collections of Babylonian texts, there will be something for our students to work on without compelling them to go abroad, as others have gone, for their material."²⁵ In addition, a number of scholarly publications, such as D. G. Lyon's article "A Half Century of Assyriology" in *The Biblical World* (1896), identified The Met as a place to see and study Assyrian and Babylonian antiquities.²⁶ But it is not always easy to assess in the limited amount of evidence available the context in which this material was deemed relevant,

fig. 6 Illustration of the Gold Room at The Met printed in Frank Leslie's *Popular Monthly* (Hitchcock 1889, 666)

particularly at the Museum itself. Tablets, it seems, were not considered works of art.

According to The Met's *General Guide* published in 1888, the tablets, displayed in the Room of Ancient Terra Cottas, were identified as "inscribed clay tablets from Assyria and Babylonia, containing a very great variety of matter in the legends, with inscribed clay barrels of Nebuchadnezzar and other Babylonian and Assyrian Kings."²⁷ Notably, the previous guide from 1881 was organized into three sections: a directory specifying the various collections according to their location in the building; a summary of art history, as illustrated by the Museum collections; and an index, by cases, enabling the visitor to link objects in a particular case to their corresponding page of the summary.²⁸ The tablets' location was given both in the directory and in the index but is not mentioned in the summary, where objects on view were discussed "according to their place in the history of art; that is, in the order of development and therefore of time."²⁹ There are no explicitly ancient Near Eastern subjects in the summary, leaving the impression that this collecting area at The Met was not considered to have a place in the history of art despite the fact that they were part of the collection.

Yet the seals somewhat contradict this assumption. According to The Met's early guides, the Assyrian and Babylonian seals that were properly identified as such were displayed with other objects of gold, silver, and precious stones, especially those from the Cesnola Collection. A description of the gallery displaying these objects from the 1889 article "New York's Art Museum," in *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, reads: "But it is the 'gold room' which has the strongest claim upon the average visitor's attention. The cases, securely locked, are protected by electric alarms. Here are eighteen cases filled with the King collection of gems, with miniatures; the Cypriote treasure from the tombs of Curium; and Babylonian cylinders, the records of the

time"³⁰ (fig. 6). And in the 1881 guide's summary of art history, the Cesnola Collection of gems and jewelry was included in the section "Transition to European Art," and its location on the second floor placed it spatially adjacent to the European collections.³¹

The seals at The Met also appear to have been recognized as works of art in *A Text-Book of the History of Sculpture* (1896): "Some idea of Babylonian sculpture may be gathered from the collections of Babylonian carved gems. The most important of these are in (1) the Metropolitan Museum, New York."³² The other collections listed were in Europe: in the British Museum in London, and in Paris, the M. de Clercq collection, the Louvre, and the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Here Cesnola's desire for the importance of The Met to be recognized in this collecting area came to fruition. Significant for locating ancient Near Eastern objects within the field of art history, this publication was the first such textbook written in the United States, and its authors, Allan Marquand and Arthur Frothingham, were professors at Princeton University in one of the first art history departments in the United States. Their connection to the ancient Near East is also noteworthy, as both had backgrounds in the study of Semitic languages and theology, although their later scholarship focused on other areas. In 1885 the two cofounded the *American Journal of Archaeology and of the History of the Fine Arts*, published by the recently created Archaeological Institute of America, an organization that had played an integral role in Ward's Wolfe Expedition to Babylonia. At Princeton in 1886, Frothingham taught the first graduate art history course, titled "Babylonian Archaeology."³³

A Text-Book of the History of Sculpture included ancient Near Eastern sculpture, identifying Babylonian and Assyrian works and also Persian and Hittite. Following the model established in European publications surveying the history of art, Marquand and Frothingham positioned these Near Eastern antiquities as evolutionary precursors to Greek sculpture. In order to effectively teach this history of sculpture, the beginning of the book included a list of addresses from which teachers could order casts of sculptures for the classroom. Not surprisingly, The Met was on the list. It was an early priority of the Museum to assemble a collection of plaster and metal cast reproductions of architectural elements, models, statuary, and reliefs with the goal to illustrate the progress and development of art.³⁴ One of the champions of this endeavor was Henry Gurdon Marquand, a great benefactor of The Met and its president from 1889 to 1902, who was also the father

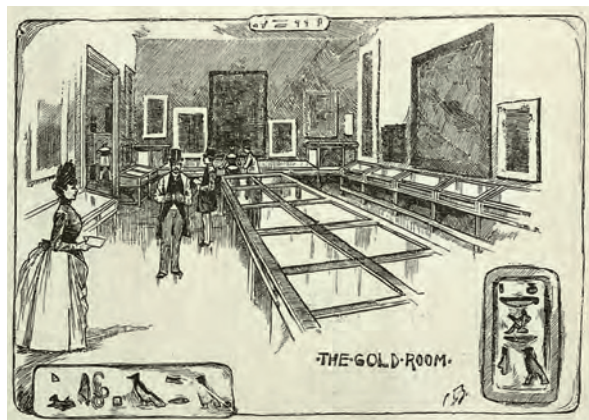




fig. 7 Plaster casts of two Assyrian relief panels from the Palace of Ashurnasirpal II at Nimrud, in the collection of the British Museum, London. The casts were formerly in The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

of Allan Marquand. Already by 1888 numerous casts of Assyrian reliefs described in the guide to the collections of that year as “taken from the wall-lining of the great hall of the palace of King Assur-nazir-apli of Assyria, in ancient Nineveh” were on display in the Hall of Casts of Ancient Sculpture, the main hall when one entered the Museum (fig. 7).³⁵ The collection of casts on display at The Met shows how at a formative time for the study of art history, ancient Near Eastern works were incorporated in a universal survey of art history in at least one museum in the United States.

THE ART OF THE BIBLE IN THE UNITED STATES

While casts of Assyrian and Babylonian sculpture at The Met were helping shape a narrative of the role of ancient Near Eastern works in art history, they served a very different function in two other museums of the same era. Casts were part of the collection of the Chautauqua Archaeological Museum established in 1881 in Chautauqua, New York (fig. 8), as well as at the George West Museum of Art and Archaeology. The latter, opened in 1887 in Round Lake, New York, had on display a cast of “a great winged lion of Nineveh” alongside “Assyro-Babylonian seal cylinders.”³⁶ Both museums were part of religious summer communities situated on lakeshores in upstate New York and reflected a growing interest in such gatherings by Protestant Christians. The communities, especially those in the Chautauqua Movement, were critical

locations in the late nineteenth century for emerging forms of particularly middle-class education and instruction.³⁷ At the museums at Chautauqua and Round Lake, the material culture of the ancient Near East was explicitly meant to “help to interpret the Bible page . . . and shed light upon the history and chronology of the Book.”³⁸ Each museum also had a connection to The Met. Hall spoke at the opening of the Chautauqua Archaeological Museum and loaned objects from his personal collection. Cesnola did the same for the George West Museum of Art and Archaeology. How these two men, who had integral roles in the formation of The Met’s collection of ancient Near Eastern art and the Museum itself, experienced these museums located in such a different context from that of The Met in New York is difficult to know.³⁹

At The Met, other than specific mentions of Nebuchadnezzar, who was also understood as a historical personage, Biblical references to this material are not readily apparent, giving the impression that its importance was perhaps not forefronted at the Museum. However, the ancient Near East situated within a Biblical framework at The Met can be glimpsed in a notice that appeared in an 1894 issue of *The Biblical World*:

Columbia College, in cooperation with the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, has arranged a series of lectures by several eminent scholars, to which the public are invited without expense. The first course of lectures, which was given in December, was by William Hayes Ward, D.D., upon the subject of *Oriental Seals and Glyptic Art*. The treatment was in four parts, Origin in Primitive Babylonia, Mythological Art of the Early and Middle Empire of Babylonia, Transfer of the Art to Assyria, Derivative Art of Persia, Syria, Asia Minor and Phoenicia. Many fine illustrations added to the interest and benefit of the lectures.⁴⁰

The notice appeared in an academic journal focusing on religion; however, the titles of the lectures notably omit references to the Bible. Instead, they focus on art, specifically the art of seals. Information regarding the content of the lectures and how the material was presented does not survive. Yet, the lecture titles suggest an interest beyond Babylonia and Assyria that is more consistent with the expansive definition of the Near East as understood today, albeit the arts of Persia, Syria, Asia Minor, and Phoenicia are identified as “derivative.” Seals allowed for this larger view, and Ward, who would later publish *The Seal Cylinders of*

fig. 8 Plaster casts of Assyrian objects in the Chautauqua Archaeological Museum, Chautauqua, New York, late 19th century

Western Asia, a comprehensive study of more than thirteen hundred cylinder seals, was the foremost scholar to do this.⁴¹ The Met, then, so closely linked by its collection of seals and association with Ward, can be understood as one place where the process of defining the ancient Near East was being worked out.⁴²

The relationship between the Bible and antiquities removed from the lands of the Ottoman Empire is more complicated than it might seem. The objects were at the intersection of language, archaeology, and art history. Two of these fields, archaeology and art history, were rapidly being codified in the nineteenth century. The study of Akkadian and Sumerian, the primary languages of Mesopotamia beginning in the third millennium B.C., was dependent on the decipherment of cuneiform, which was also taking place at this time. The antiquities that were so desired by European nations and the United States connected the Biblical past with objects, works of art, and monuments and helped create a visual image for the religious accounts told in the Bible. In the United States higher education in the nineteenth century was inextricably linked with Christian training, as educated men were likely to come from a seminary background. Colleges also had a decidedly Christian focus. Interest in the ancient Near East through both study and collecting fit squarely within the structures and systems of the time. In contrast to the formation of a museum collection such as that of the British Museum, which was firmly rooted in a colonial framework, the religious underpinnings of the early acquisitions of ancient Near Eastern (Mesopotamian) material culture at U.S. museums like The Met can be tied to some of the individuals responsible for those acquisitions.⁴³ To what extent religion played a direct role in the collecting and presentation of this material is less clear.



ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN ART AT THE MET IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Although it is difficult to fully know the motivations behind The Met's initial interests in collecting objects that are now labeled as ancient Near Eastern, the factors at play were certainly multifaceted. A much more comprehensive study of the collecting and display practices by the Museum in the early decades of its history is necessary to further situate The Met in the larger narrative of the construction of ancient Near Eastern studies in the United States.⁴⁴ Yet these objects, in particular tablets, seals, and casts of ancient sculpture, were considered relevant to the Museum, and some more for their significance in the history of art than previously realized. The Met's creation and shaping of collections participated in the development of systems of classification that have had long-lasting effects on the current divisions of scholarship and administrative structures of universities and museums. Today, as in the nineteenth century, museums are places of mediation for the Western encounter with the ancient Near East—or perhaps more recognizably to the contemporary visitor, the Middle East. Museums have also more recently been the focus of debates surrounding their collecting practices, reflecting changing views that are part of contemporary academic and popular discourse. Many institutions have been reluctant to recognize and engage in this discourse.⁴⁵

Large and encompassing museums like The Met are places where a visitor can encounter objects from many parts of the world over vast expanses of time. There is a responsibility inherent in such an endeavor to recognize how the presentation of these objects shapes views of those parts of the world and in relation to one another. This article has not addressed the specific places from which ancient Near Eastern objects in The Met's collection were taken and the circumstances under which they were removed. This is not because it is irrelevant but rather because the work of recognizing, researching, and contextualizing the objects at The Met, as begun in this article, must take place first. How attitudes toward the lands where the objects came from and more importantly the people who lived there at the end of the nineteenth century were being shaped by collecting at the time needs to be addressed, and doing so will be one way that allows ancient Near Eastern art continued relevance in the world today.

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NOTES

- 1 The name changed from the Harvard Semitic Museum in 2020.
- 2 See Lacovara 2018 for a limited survey of U.S. museums exhibiting ancient Near Eastern art. While not intended to be comprehensive, it is the only such survey published and unfortunately includes a number of errors regarding the history of The Met's collection. See also Olbrantz 2013 for a broad survey of the U.S. discovery of the ancient Near East, which focuses heavily on museums, but also includes errors about The Met.
- 3 Harper 2001 provides the most recent review of the history of The Met's Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art. The general timeline is that in 1932 the Department of Near Eastern Art—encompassing both ancient and Islamic phases of art history—was established, and then 1963 marked the final break between the two collections with the establishment of the Department of Islamic Art. However, much of this history is linked with individuals who moved between departments. For example, Charles Wilkinson started as a member of the Egyptian Expedition in the Egyptian Art Department, and then moved to the Persian Expedition in the Near Eastern Art Department, then curator of Near Eastern Archaeology in Egyptian Art, then curator in the Ancient Near Eastern Art Department, then curator of the Near Eastern Art Department. It is less clear if collections moved so easily between Museum departments.
- 4 Charter of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, State of New York, Laws of 1870, Chapter 197, passed April 13, 1870, and amended L.1898, ch. 34; L.1908, ch. 219. <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met>.
- 5 While there are a number of articles focused on aspects of this historiography (Holloway 2004 and Foster 2007, for example), the only two full-length publications are Meade 1974 and Kuklick 1996. Meade 1974 is a straightforward detailing of the scholarly history of Assyriology in the United States. Kuklick 1996 is broader but focuses primarily on the story of the University of Pennsylvania's archaeological expedition to Nippur in the 1880s and 1890s and the ensuing controversies. Bruce Kuklick attempts to contextualize this narrative within the history of ancient Near Eastern studies, but his unfamiliarity with the field (he specializes in U.S. history) places him at a disadvantage when writing about its peculiarities and specifics. In particular, an apparent lack of familiarity with institutions other than the University of Pennsylvania comes across when he

- writes (*ibid.*, 116): "But museums without a university bond never took a primary role in the field of ancient Near Eastern studies. The centrality of the American university to intellectual life meant that unaffiliated museums were ancillary to the universities in the production of knowledge." Unfortunately, this conclusion is based on an incomplete and incorrect understanding of The Met's relationship with the material. Even more problematic is the following from Kuklick (*ibid.*): "The Metropolitan was additionally acquiring Babylonian material through the activity of J. P. Morgan, although he later shifted his attention to his own museum, the Morgan Library." Kuklick's account of how The Met was acquiring objects from the Middle East is wrong, as research I have undertaken on Morgan and his connection to the ancient Near East makes clear (see note 42 below).
- 6 See Scheffler 2003; Porter 2010; S. Cohen 2014; Van Dongen 2014; and Gunter 2019 for more recent discussions of the term "ancient Near East." The use of "Western Asia" is periodically adopted by institutions, most recently by the Morgan Library and Museum in 2020, for its Department of Ancient Western Asian Seals and Tablets.
 - 7 This story of "discovery" is commonly described in scholarly studies such as M. Larsen 1996 and also more popular accounts such as Fagan 2007. There has been a turn in the scholarship to a more critical understanding of the complex reality of this "discovery"; see Bohrer 2003; Bahrani, Çelik, and Eldem 2011; Malley 2012; and Çelik 2016. Among the various problematic aspects of the narrative is the myth that people living in these lands were not aware of the antiquities around them. See in particular Anderson 2015 for an alternative view focused on local relationships to objects and monuments from antiquity.
 - 8 There is a great deal of literature on the European reception of the ancient Near East. For broad studies, see M. Larsen 1996, Bohrer 2003, and Malley 2012; for more specialized studies, see Malley 2008, T. Larsen 2009, and Brusius 2012.
 - 9 While European colonial involvement driven primarily by economic and commercial interests may not characterize U.S. involvement in the region in the nineteenth century, religious motivation certainly played a role. Both the U.S. missionary activity undertaken in the Ottoman Empire and U.S. popular interest in the Holy Land are defining features of the relationship between the United States and the Near East at the time

- and need to be further explored as context for the emergence of ancient Near Eastern studies.
- 10 The desire to illustrate the Biblical narrative with material objects and sites is repeatedly presented as an unquestioned fact in much of the scholarship. Kuklick 1996 attempts to contextualize this assertion, with mixed results.
 - 11 The British Museum by this time had amassed an enormous collection of cuneiform tablets.
 - 12 Eppihimer 2018.
 - 13 Ménant 1886.
 - 14 A. Cohen and Kangas 2010.
 - 15 *Annual Report of the Trustees of The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, no. 21 (1890): 465.
 - 16 See Nikolaou 2018 for Cesnola's exploration for antiquities on Cyprus contextualized in regard to Ottoman antiquities' regulations and the production of archaeological knowledge in the nineteenth century.
 - 17 The entire Cesnola Collection at The Met was funded by subscription. See Karageorghis, Mertens, and Rose 2000 for The Met's presentation of this material; see also Knoblauch 2019 and Olien 2016 for other perspectives. It is also worth noting that Cypriot art is commonly positioned in relation to other regions of the Mediterranean and in museums can belong to either departments of classical art or ancient Near Eastern art.
 - 18 A stone weight inscribed with cuneiform (MMA 74.51.4426) was published as part of the Cesnola Collection in Myres 1914, 556, no. 4426. However, this object was first published by Ward in 1889, where he explicitly states that he collected it as part of the Wolfe Expedition (Ward 1889, lvi). This contradiction is a good example of the difficulties of understanding the early acquisitions at The Met. A registrar's department dedicated to registering and cataloguing objects that entered The Met was not established until 1906. It was at this time that the current system of assigning accession numbers was set up. It is unclear when and how objects acquired before 1906 were given accession numbers retroactively. More value may be placed on Ward's publication of the stone weight than on Myres's catalogue, which was written decades after the Cesnola objects were acquired by The Met.
 - 19 The Wolfe Expedition is the turning point in the U.S. interest in and subsequent collecting of ancient Near Eastern artifacts; Ward 1886. I am working on an examination of Ward and his role in ancient Near Eastern studies in the United States.
 - 20 *Annual Report of the Trustees of The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, no. 17 (1886): 358–59.
 - 21 Report of the President, Secretary and Treasurer to the Trustees, Nov. 15, 1886, Antiquities – Assyrian & Babylonian Purchases – Ward file, Office of the Secretary Records, MMA Archives; citation kindly provided by Jim Moske.
 - 22 Howe 1913, 219.
 - 23 Hall, like Ward, is an underexamined figure in ancient Near Eastern studies.
 - 24 *Annual Report of the Trustees of The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, no. 17 (1886): 358–59.
 - 25 *The Independent . . . Devoted to the Consideration of Politics, Social and Economic Tendencies, History, Literature, and the Arts* (New York) 45, no. 2325 (June 22, 1893): 17.
 - 26 Lyon 1896, 134.
 - 27 Metropolitan Museum [1888], 5.
 - 28 Metropolitan Museum 1881, [2].
 - 29 Ibid., [6]. Although the tablets appear in the index, the note "See card in the case" is given instead of a corresponding page number in the summary of art history.

- 30 Hitchcock 1889, 673.
- 31 Metropolitan Museum 1881, 14.
- 32 Marquand and Frothingham 1896, 35.
- 33 Princeton University 1885, 56.
- 34 The subject of casts in U.S. museums has been widely focused on casts of classical art and the implications of this collecting and display practice. See Wallach 1998; Born 2002; Dyson 2010; and Perry 2018. See also "Facsimiles, Artworks, and Real Things," by Rebecca Capua, in this volume. For The Met's casts, see Metropolitan Museum 1891, 1892, and 1910. For ancient Near Eastern casts primarily in Europe, see Rehm 2018 and Rehm 2020, with a small section on casts in U.S. museums; and also Collins 2020.
- 35 Metropolitan Museum [1888], 3.
- 36 See Kittredge 1881 for a description of the Chautauqua collection; and George West Museum of Art and Archaeology 1887 for the other collection.
- 37 The Chautauqua Movement needs to be seriously considered in an examination of ancient Near Eastern studies in the United States, especially as religious summer communities have been identified as places essential to the formation of American culture and character. See Rieser 2003 for the movement in general and especially chapter 4 for a discussion of the museum at Chautauqua in the context of race and nationalism in the movement.
- 38 Kittredge 1881, 5.
- 39 I am unaware of any primary sources that speak to this question.
- 40 *Biblical World* 1894, 68. *The Biblical World* is still in publication, now under the title *The Journal of Religion*. The *Annual Report of the Trustees of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (no. 31 [1900]: 812), lists four other lectures given at the Museum by Ward in cooperation with Columbia University on the topic "Art and Religion in the Primitive East": March 3, "Conditions of Primitive Civilization in Babylonia"; March 10, "Primitive Art of Babylonia (before 2500 B.C.)"; March 17, "Origin of Dualism in Primitive Babylonia (Bel and the Dragon)"; and March 31, "The Religion of the Hittites."
- 41 Ward 1910.
- 42 The history of the earliest collection of cylinder seals in The Met is complicated, and only a brief summary is provided here. In 1895 The Met published Hand-Book no. 12, *Seal Cylinders and Other Oriental Seals*, authored by Ward. This publication included 751 cylinder seals, the majority of which had most likely been purchased from Ward in 1886 and 1893. In 1908 most of these cylinder seals were sold by The Met to J. Pierpont Morgan, president of the Museum at the time, as they were considered "not germane to the scope of the Museum" [Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees, held June 15, 1908]. The transfer of this significant collection of cylinder seals had an enormous effect on the status of ancient Near Eastern art at The Met in subsequent years. The full story of this episode in The Met's history and the implications for the Morgan Library's collection of cylinder seals is forthcoming (Rakic n.d., forthcoming).
- 43 That is not to say that religion did not play a part in collecting practices rooted in colonialism. The intersection of colonialism, orientalism, and religion is complex. See the essays in Holloway 2007 for varied approaches within the framework of ancient Near Eastern studies.
- 44 My forthcoming look at the development of ancient Near Eastern studies in the United States will properly situate The Met in this narrative, and will focus on key figures, including Luigi Palma di Cesnola, Isaac H. Hall, William Hayes Ward, and J. Pierpont Morgan.

45 The Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art is currently engaged in a project to reimagine the stories and renovate the spaces that present the permanent collection to the public. The questions of why these objects are in a museum and how they get here will be forefronted in the new galleries, in large part through a focus on collecting histories and object biographies. The department's aim is to highlight collecting stories as a way to activate discussion and to contextualize ancient objects within contemporary discourse, exploring how objects are transformed when they enter the museum space as well as their roles in shaping and constructing knowledge.

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The Sèvres Elephant Garniture and the Politics of Dispersal during the French Revolution

IRIS MOON

Pink ribbons crisscross around the curved bellies of two porcelain vases, each crowned with a pair of bejeweled white elephant heads. Their curled tusks flank a large potpourri vase in the form of an extravagant ship. This ensemble has held pride of place in the Wrightsman Galleries for the French Decorative Arts at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, demonstrating the exceptional craftsmanship of the Sèvres royal porcelain manufactory in executing Rococo flights of fantasy for royal and aristocratic patrons in mid-eighteenth-century France (fig. 1). The garniture exemplified the French court's predilection for Sèvres porcelain, which was exchanged as diplomatic gifts and prominently displayed on the mantels and tables of wealthy European residences. In subsequent centuries, Sèvres royal porcelain



fig. 1 Sèvres royal porcelain manufactory (French, 1740–present). Potpourri vase and pair of elephant-head vases (from a garniture), ca. 1758. Soft-paste porcelain; potpourri: H. 17 $\frac{1}{8}$ × W. 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ × D. 7 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (44.8 × 37.5 × 19.4 cm); vase (58.75.90a, b): H. 15 $\frac{1}{16}$ × W. 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ × D. 6 $\frac{3}{16}$ in. (39.5 × 25.7 × 15.7 cm); vase (58.75.91a, b): H. 15 $\frac{1}{16}$ × W. 10 $\frac{3}{16}$ × D. 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (39.2 × 26.2 × 15.9 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Samuel H. Kress Foundation, 1958 (58.75.89a, b; .90a, b; .91a, b)

maintained strong associations with the *ancien régime*, as the period was mythologized by aesthetes such as the Goncourt brothers. By the mid-twentieth century, Sèvres could be found in the homes of U.S. collectors, where Americans claimed it as a symbol of elite taste. To this day, French royal porcelain retains its mystique as a sign of exclusivity, enshrined in elegant displays and roped-off period rooms of museums such as The Met.¹ Yet porcelain was not always an unquestioned symbol of prestige and power. For in 1789, as the *ancien régime* world came to an abrupt end with the French Revolution, the status of royal porcelain, along with other forms of material finery that had trenchant cultural associations with the royal past, was challenged, as rarefied objects of curiosity and prestige acquired ambiguous political meanings.

This article traces the afterlife of the Sèvres elephant garniture in the context of the French Revolution in order to explore how the politics of dispersal opened up new and contested meanings for luxury. Like many examples of French porcelain, the garniture began as a work intended for delectation within the confines of a private collection. Purchased by the prince de Condé, a favored and devoted courtier of Louis XV and the French crown, in 1758, the garniture was originally displayed within the apartments of the Palais Bourbon. The symbolic power of porcelain drew upon a discourse

of the exotic and the rare, while simultaneously forming an element of a tightly orchestrated interior decoration and architectural schemes of *convenance*, a theory of building that dictated that an individual's residence had to convey one's place in the social order. With the French Revolution, the porcelain garniture joined the vast number of possessions that had been loosened from these sealed architectural envelopes and seized by the revolutionary government from the collections of royals, émigrés, and the clergy. Claimed as part of a new national patrimony on behalf of France's citizens, such objects were dispersed at auction or placed in the newly established public museum. Recognized by the opportunistic art dealer Jean-Baptiste Pierre Le Brun in 1793 and initially reserved for inclusion in the new national museum at the Louvre by the Commission temporaire des arts, the elephant garniture was exchanged for a natural history cabinet before once more arriving on the auction block. Removed from its setting within the Palais Bourbon, where it was initially placed, the garniture participated in broader debates about the place of the decorative arts and luxury in educating the public, and the problematic language of fantasy and the exotic within the patriotic discourse of the Revolution.

Choosing to read the Sèvres elephant garniture in this unsettling historical context allows us to grasp the

ways in which the politics of dispossession, in other words, an object's point of departure, rather than provenance alone, can reorient its meanings and generate new historical contexts. Sèvres scholarship has typically—and rightly—positioned The Met's garniture as an example of the highest achievements of the royal manufactory, and the rare and ambitious forms it produced under the patronage of the French crown. Archival documents attest to the many painters, mold makers, gilders, and decorators who contributed to creating some of the finest examples of French porcelain in the eighteenth century, and the discerning individuals who purchased them in recognizing the artistry of each piece made by the manufactory. Yet for the most part, scholarly approaches have unduly emphasized porcelain as a reflection of personal tastes on the part of those who purchased the objects.² Reading the Sèvres garniture against the grain, what meanings accrued when it became an instrument of bartering, exchange, and uncertain value, no longer anchored in the private collection of a singular patron? In short, what happens when private porcelain becomes a matter of charged public debate?

A ROSE-COLORED PAST, PRINCELY AND MONSTROUS

When the Bastille, the fortified prison on the banks of the Seine that had become a symbol of French despotism, was demolished on July 14, 1789, Louis Joseph de Bourbon, prince de Condé, was one of the few members of the royalty who recognized that its fall portended the end of the ancien régime and the French crown.³ Anxiously processing news of the events taking place from his family seat at Chantilly, he wrote in his journal, "On Tuesday July 14 in the evening at Chantilly we learned that the rebels had taken the Bastille; we had difficulty grasping it, but finally it was clear: I believed that I could no longer avoid going the next day with my children to the side of the king, whose crown at the very least was in danger."⁴ Quickly grasping the gravity of the situation, the prince de Condé and his family left Paris on July 17, a mere three days after the demolition of the Bastille. Traveling to the court of Turin, then ruled by his cousin Victor Amadeus III, king of Sardinia, he sought to organize a royalist army. In haste, the prince left behind the family's celebrated estate at Chantilly and the official residence at the Palais Bourbon, as well as the many lavish paintings, sculptures, and furnishings that had filled them.

The elephant garniture, located in the official apartments of the Palais Bourbon, had been purchased thirty years earlier, long before anyone could have

foreseen the events of 1789. Louis Joseph de Bourbon, prince de Condé, was the great-great-grandson of Louis XIV and a descendant of the military general known as the Grand Condé. Though shy in his youth, the prince distinguished himself through his military prowess during the Seven Years' War (1756–63), and was one of the few French generals who saw successes on the battlefield against the Prussians.⁵ However, his main preoccupation, like that of his princely forebears, consisted, in the words of Marcelle Brunet, of "building, embellishing his residences, and furnishing them with *objets d'art* in the taste of the day, which included examples of Sèvres porcelain, despite the fact that his own father had founded a celebrated soft-paste manufactory at Chantilly in 1725."⁶ Like the many wealthy French patrons of the day, the prince purchased porcelain at the shop of the marchand-mercier Lazare Duvaux on the rue Saint-Honoré, where he and his wife, Charlotte Godefride Elisabeth de Rohan, had bought several pieces of "porcelaine de France" colored in a bleu-céleste ground.

During a hiatus from the Seven Years' War, the prince acquired five vases at the 1758 Christmas sale of Sèvres porcelain held in the king's apartments at Versailles.⁷ Courtiers were expected to buy pieces in a demonstration of support for the king's favored porcelain manufactory. Then a youthful twenty-two years old, Louis Joseph bought a set of five pieces described in the manufactory's official registry as "1 Pot-poury a vaisseau Roze enfans 1.200, 2 Vases a Oreilles 1er Id 720 1440, 2 Id a Elephant 1er, Id 840 1680."⁸ The pair of *vases à oreilles* today in the Musée du Louvre are believed to have originally been displayed together with the vases at The Met as a set of five, indicated by the inventory records of the Palais Bourbon (fig. 2).⁹ He thus spent the exorbitant sum of 4,320 livres on the five vases, among the most expensive purchases of Sèvres at the time.¹⁰ For comparison, the economist François Quesnay estimated the annual wage of an average laborer to amount to 500 livres in the mid-eighteenth century.¹¹ It was the first time Sèvres offered works colored in pink, attesting to the prince's predilection for the newest inventions of the manufactory.¹²

The prince's extravagant purchase indicates the important role that porcelain continued to play in a European court politics that depended upon material forms of princely magnificence as signs of fealty.¹³ As early as the sixteenth century, European monarchs coveted high-fired blue and white porcelain from China. Praised for its translucency, whiteness, and durability, there was nothing quite like it in Europe at the time.

fig. 2 Sèvres royal porcelain manufactory. Pair of vases à oreilles, 1758. Soft-paste porcelain, both $16\frac{9}{16} \times 6\frac{5}{16}$ in. (42×16 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris (OA 11986-OA 11987)



Goldsmiths often mounted pieces of blue and white porcelain, attesting to their preciousness, as with the Burghley porcelain in The Met's British Galleries. Though Renaissance princes like Francesco de' Medici set up secret workshops in an attempt to re-create the recipe for true porcelain, Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony, was the first to develop a true hard-paste porcelain body at Meissen in 1710. The Prussian defeat of Saxony halted porcelain production at Meissen, allowing Sèvres to reach new ascendancy as a producer of prized diplomatic gifts. Sèvres emerged out of a smaller factory at Vincennes established in 1740, favored by Louis XV and his mistress, Madame de Pompadour. It was moved to a larger site at Sèvres in 1756, and the king purchased the manufactory three years later, thus officially tying it to the crown.¹⁴ Many different specialists—whether it was the modeler, mold maker, gilder, or chaser—contributed to the completion of a single piece of porcelain. The highest-paid artisans were the figure painters, including Pompadour's favorite, Charles-Nicolas Dodin. Science also played a key role in Sèvres's development. Jean Hellot, member of the

Royal Academy of Sciences, discovered new recipes for porcelain bodies, glazes, enamels, and gilding, allowing Sèvres to develop novel jewel-toned colors such as "bleu céleste," "fond vert," and of course its pink, known as "fond rose."¹⁵

The elephant garniture reflected the prevailing taste for novelty at a French court that abhorred boredom. The manufactory rapidly expanded its repertoire of shapes, decoration, and colors. The model for the elephant vase was first recorded in 1756 and combines molded and thrown sections. The pair of white elephant heads flank the profiles of each bottle-shaped vase, with the raised gilded trunks supported beneath by small handles that appear to be a variant of the initial design supplied by Jean-Claude Duplessis.¹⁶ Bunches of flowers have been painted into garlands that connect behind the latticework of ribbons with pinked edges tipped in gold. The eyelids of each elephant are painted a delicate pink shade. Tiny golden hairs create a downy effect inside each pachyderm's ear, visible upon close inspection. The curved trunks, originally intended to hold candles, echo the four pillowy scrolled feet of the

base, decorated with curled acanthus leaves, and the gentle curve of double bead strands that part at the neck of each vase. The model for the equally inventive shape of the potpourri vase, or *pot pourri à vaisseau*, also designed by Duplessis, was recorded in 1757, its ship form perhaps intended to create an associative effect that would transport those who inhaled the perfumes contained within the vessel.¹⁷ Intricate cutouts on the openwork lid served the functional purpose of allowing the scent of dried flowers to escape, enhanced by pink and gilding to create an arresting pattern of circles and crescents resembling peacock feathers. The plunging décolletage of the lid is echoed by the cartouche-shaped central reserve, which features dancing putti in the clouds on one side and a bouquet of flowers on the other side of the potpourri.

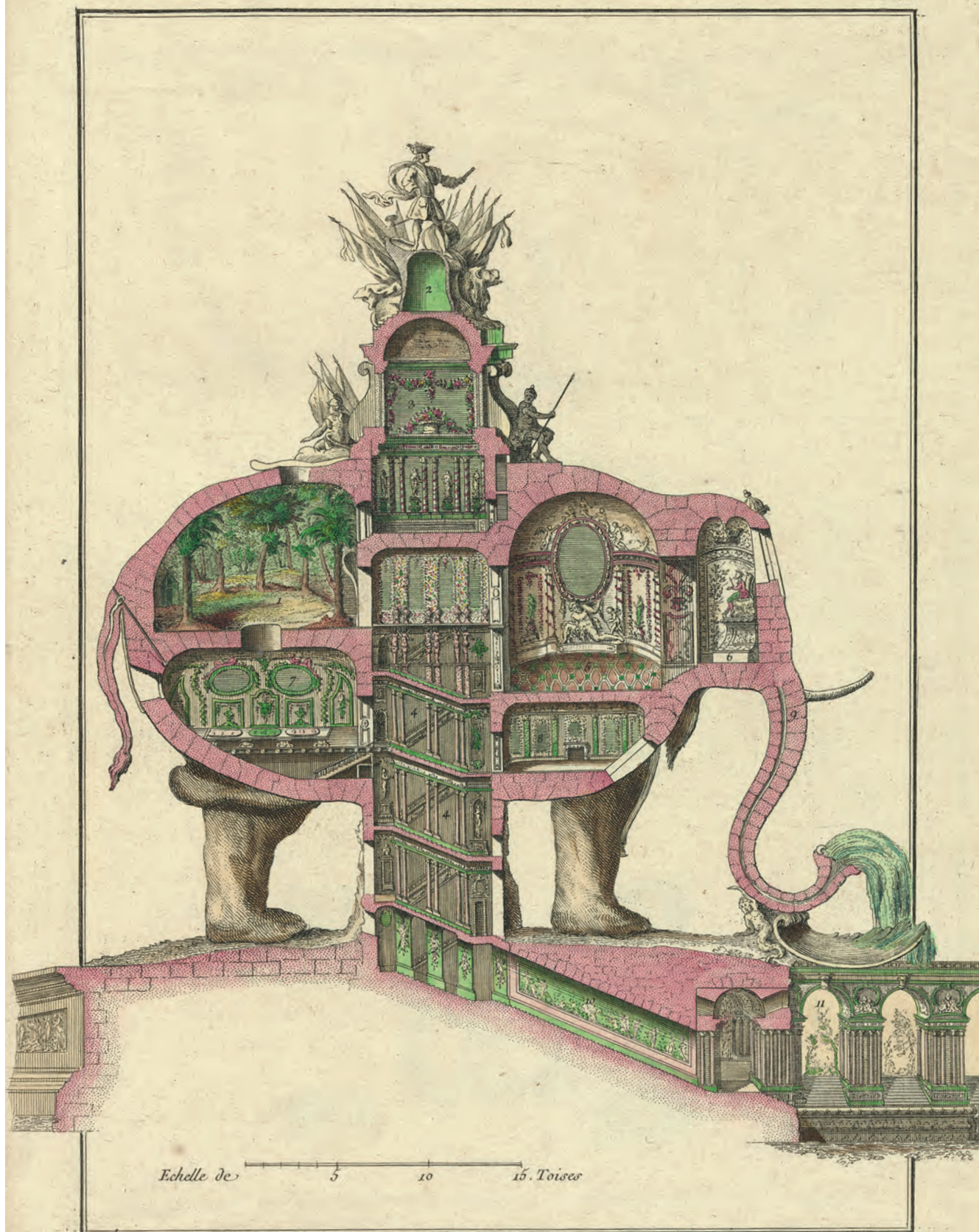
At the Palais Bourbon, the prince de Condé's official residence in Paris, the pink-colored garniture formed part of an elaborately coordinated interior, updated to suit the tastes of its inhabitants. Originally built on the banks of the Seine for Louise Françoise, duchesse de Bourbon and daughter of Louis XIV, the palace combined three residences of the main palace, the adjoining Hôtel de Lassay, and the newly constructed Pavillon des Petits Appartements; work continued in the second half of the eighteenth century, but it remained incomplete in 1789.¹⁸ The prince de Condé originally intended the porcelain vases as a gift to his wife, Charlotte Godefride Elisabeth de Rohan, who

occupied the formal apartments in the main palace before her death at the age of twenty-three. An inventory of her apartments in 1760, less than two years after her husband had purchased the vases, lists the set in her bedroom.¹⁹ When the prince's son, the duc d'Enghien, married Bathilde d'Orléans in 1770, the prince gave the formal suite of rooms to his daughter-in-law. In the winter, a set of pink Gobelins tapestries decorated the alcove of the formal bedchamber. It was based on the designs of François Boucher and Maurice Jacques, and the latter also designed the matching bed (fig. 3).²⁰ Placed opposite the chimney, the Sèvres garniture was displayed on the commode designed by Jean-François Leleu, forming part of a harmonious pink ensemble of contrasting textures that demonstrated what Mimi Hellman has described as the French interior's "joy of sets."²¹

The prominent elephant heads found on the bottle vases expressed the powerful hold that a discourse of the exotic and the rare exerted over elite consumers, even as Enlightenment philosophers increasingly sought to dispel the language of wonder in favor of rational, empirical knowledge. Though the exact source of inspiration for Duplessis's highly unusual, double-headed design is unclear, it is possible that he was influenced by Japanese models and the examples made after them at Meissen.²² French naturalists were already familiar with elephants in the seventeenth century, and it is possible that Duplessis knew of the legendary elephant given to Louis XIV in 1668 by the king of Portugal. Originally from the Kongo region, the diplomatic gift lived at the royal menagerie, where it was sketched by the Flemish painter Pieter Boel.²³ At its death in 1681, the king's elephant was transported to Paris, where members of the Royal Academy of Sciences carefully dissected the fresh corpse for research.²⁴ When Louis XIV arrived to view the spectacle, he promptly asked the whereabouts of the anatomist in charge of the dissection, at which point "M. du Verney immediately arose from the flanks of the animal by which he was, so to speak, engulfed."²⁵ Even during the reign of Louis XV, architects saw the colossal proportions of the elephant as a potential expression of sovereignty in built form. In 1758, the same year the prince de Condé purchased the garniture, the architect-engineer Charles François Ribart de Chamoustop proposed building a monument to Louis XV in the form of an elephant on the Etoile hill, then on the rural outskirts of Paris (fig. 4). Replete with an interior garden and a ballroom, the monument took the most fantastic aspects of Rococo planning and transformed them into



fig. 3 Manufacture des Gobelins (French, established 1662). *Aurora and Cephalus*, from the sixth weaving of the *Loves of the Gods*, ca. 1775. Silk and wool, 14 ft. 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. \times 11 ft. 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (443 \times 360.5 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris (OA5121)



Profil de l'Edifice sur la longueur.

fig. 4 Pierre Patte (French, 1723–1814) after Charles François Ribart de Chamoust (French, act. late 18th century). Section view of Ribart's elephant monument from Ribart de Chamoust 1758, pl. VI. Hand-colored etching. Avery Architectural & Fine Arts Library, Columbia University (AA2597 R35)

fig. 5 Sèvres royal porcelain manufactory; Charles-Nicolas Dodin (decorator) (French, 1734–1803). Pair of vases à tête d'éléphant, ca. 1760. Soft-paste porcelain, H. 12¼ in. (31.1 cm). The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore (VO.34, 48.1796, 48.1797)



an architecture of pure folly, with the language of pink Sèvres reconfigured in Ribart's section drawing to express the *poché* flesh of the walls. Reaction to the monument was, in the words of Baron Grimm, only somewhat admirable: "There is something of the gigantesque and Egyptian in this idea that excuses in some manner the absurdity and extravagance."²⁶

Flagrantly anticlassical in color and shape, both the Sèvres elephant garniture and the proposed colossal monument can together be seen as instances of a Rococo aesthetics of monstrosity, a term, as Chi-Ming Yang observes, that tended to be reserved for objects made in the *goût chinois*, or "Chinese taste." It is well known that Madame de Pompadour was a fervent consumer of Sèvres vessels designed in the "Chinese taste" with decorative paintings invented by Dodin. One pair of elephant-head vases she purchased in 1760 coupled the model with painted chinoiserie figures of the sense of smell and hearing, based on prints after François Boucher. On the one hand, such decorations suggested the tenacious aesthetic associations between porcelain and the mysterious origins of the precious material in China (fig. 5).²⁷ On the other hand, Yang argues that

luxury objects such as the Sèvres elephant vases helped to propel the seemingly innocuous and frivolous fantasies about the Other upon which subsequent orientalist ideologies of race and culture were built. The dissemination of these fantasies of the Other through polite and fragile decorative arts forms was by no means incidental. The "monstrous beauty" displayed in the Sèvres elephant vases—both attracting and repulsing the viewer with their intertwined bizarreness and technical perfection—provided the very means by which the decorative arts figured, in the words of Yang, an "embodied aesthetic experience of delight and horror at the possibilities and inequities of global trade."²⁸ Porcelain put the inchoate and vast complexities of global trade in the eighteenth century, rife with exploitation, expropriation, profits, and speculation, into a material form ripe for polite consumption in the European domestic setting.²⁹ While it is uncertain how much time the prince de Condé dedicated to contemplating the fraught meanings of the porcelain garniture he had purchased at the king's sale as a dutiful courtier, such porcelain bizarreries had become objects of contempt by the French Revolution.

PORCELAIN AND MUSEUM POLITICS

Vandalism, described by Louis Réau as “the destruction or the barbarous mutilation of works of art created over the course of centuries by human genius,” was first deployed in 1794, in the midst of the most radical phase of the French Revolution known as the Terror.³⁰ The abbé Grégoire, a former clergyman and political tactician, had first coined the word while addressing the National Convention on 14 Fructidor year III (August 31, 1794) on the need to protect monuments amid the impassioned attempts to destroy the traces of feudalism. According to Réau, the term captured the revolutionaries’ desire to effect nothing short of “the abolition of the past, as if the past, always alive in each of us, could be erased with the stroke of the pen.”³¹ The Terror tends to send erstwhile dry historians, even an *homme d’archive* like Réau, into apoplectic fits, in recounting the many monuments desecrated and destroyed as part of the official state policies of the revolutionary government that sanctioned violence. The forced dispersal of seized collections, and the liquidation of the royal collections after the guillotining of Louis XVI on January 21, 1793, was particularly egregious for the nineteenth-century historian and connoisseur Jean-Charles Davillier, who equated the sales to vandalism:

How many masterpieces were destroyed by vandalism; how many were sold for a crust of bread! On 10th August, at the time of the sack of the Tuileries, the royal furniture, the clocks, the most precious art objects were hurled out

of the windows. The sumptuous furniture of the château of Versailles, publicly put on sale, was dispersed at low prices in exchange for *assignats* and became the prey of hawkers, scrap-iron merchants and junk dealers (*chaudronniers*).³²

Yet just as many objects persisted during the Revolution as were destroyed, thus providing rare opportunities for acquisition. Even as politically conservative historians like Davillier mourned the loss of such objects, they personally profited from the dispersal of royal collections.³³ And while individuals in the immediate context of the Revolution such as Alexandre Lenoir have been praised by curators today for helping to save and safeguard monuments and precious objects from destruction, it is an acknowledged fact that the modern museum that emerged in the revolutionary context and the related principles of conservation would not have been possible without the same violent politics of revolution (fig. 6).³⁴ Were we to trace an alternative history of revolutionary vandalism through the spaces of The Met, for example, the itinerary would ignore the arbitrary division of departments and blaze a path from the stone fragments of the medieval galleries, such as the head of King David that once decorated the portal of Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris (fig. 7), into the spaces of European Sculpture and Decorative Arts, where the stained glass of Saint Etienne de Troyes, hung in the French Renaissance galleries, is all that remains of the now disappeared church (fig. 8). While we might mourn the loss of such structures or condemn the barbarism of the perpetrators of violence, the politics of the past has undeniably created different constellations of meaning across the Museum, attesting to the stories of loss that have shaped its collection.

Objets de luxe, as suggested by Davillier’s evocative description, posed particularly vexing problems for the revolutionaries, who sought to select works of art worthy of educating the newly liberated citizens of the French Republic. What they did not want were reminders of a corrupt and repudiated past. Though porcelain was not high on the list of artistic treasures, the new meanings that the elephant porcelain garniture acquired were conditioned by its radically changed physical context. Removed from the Palais Bourbon, the set entered the realm of the public sphere. A host of bric-a-brac characters right out of a Balzac novel, such as the crafty dealer Le Brun and the printseller Suzanne Marguerite Denoor and her ex-husband, the naturalist and adventurer François Levaillant, whom she divorced during the Revolution, came to replace the elite patrons who



fig. 6 Pierre J. Lafontaine (Belgian, 1758–1835). *Alexandre Lenoir Opposing the Destruction of the Tomb of Louis XII, King of France, at Saint Denis*, ca. 1794. Drawing, 10 ¹⁵/₁₆ × 9 ¹/₁₆ in. (27.8 × 23.2 cm). Musée Carnavalet, Paris (D.3837)



fig. 7 Head of King David from Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris, ca. 1145. Limestone, H. 11¹¹/₁₆ × W. 8⁵/₁₆ × D. 8³/₁₆ in. (29.7 × 21.1 × 21.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1938 (38.180)

had enjoyed the bizarre fantasies of Sèvres garnitures during the ancien régime in the privacy of their well-appointed homes.

The prince de Condé's departure in 1789 and his organization of a royalist army made his property and possessions visible political targets of the radical government in France. In 1793, Chantilly and the Palais Bourbon were placed under sequestration and seized by the government. The Parisian residence was used as a prison, then as a warehouse for military convoys, and later as a polytechnical school, before it was converted in 1795 into a national palace for the Council of Five Hundred, the legislative body that, along with the Council of Ancients, replaced the National Convention during the Directory period.³⁵ The perpetually cash-strapped government seized the possessions left behind by exiles, stockpiling them at the Dépôt de Nesle, in order to sell them at auction, trade, or keep them for the new museum.³⁶ Removed from their elegant settings, porcelain, jewelry, textiles, books, and busts reappeared

at the year-long government auctions that began on August 25, 1793, at the Palace of Versailles, held to finance the mounting cost of military campaigns. Objects that had once stood as treasured possessions and exceptional works of art were sold for a handful of worthless assignats, the paper currency newly issued by a French government that not only was bankrupt, but also had no credit to speak of among the crowned heads of Europe. The Commission temporaire des arts, a body of experts formed under the influence of the painter Jacques-Louis David and tasked with dispersing the seized possessions of émigrés, divided the prince de Condé's possessions into two groups: those that would be sold at auction, and those that would be saved for the benefit of the nation.³⁷ The auctions took place over the course of 1793 and 1794, with the most important, according to Christian Baulez, occurring in the midst of the Terror beginning on 21 Germinal year II (April 10, 1794). Held in situ at the palace renamed the "Maison de la Révolution," the auctions saw the departure of the Gobelins tapestries and matching en suite furniture that had once been in the duchess's bedroom, along with Savonnerie carpets, velvet bed curtains, marble consoles, crystal chandeliers, and mirrors.³⁸ Not everything was sold off, however. As Baulez notes, the members of the Commission reserved the best furnishings and works of art, including the Sèvres elephant garniture, for the use of government officials and the newly established museum at the former palace of the Louvre.

In spite of the great tumult of liquidations, seizures, and sales, the connoisseurial precision of Le Brun allowed him to recognize the worth of the porcelains amid the prince de Condé's treasures, and reserve them for the museum.³⁹ Cunning and self-serving, the most famous paintings dealer of the ancien régime had begun his career as an artist, studying under Boucher and Fragonard, before eventually settling on a career as a connoisseur, dealer, and restorer.⁴⁰ Le Brun meticulously catalogued the works that passed through his hôtel at the rue Cléry, illuminated by zenithal lighting before the comte d'Angiviller had considered it for the king's royal gallery.⁴¹ Notwithstanding his expertise, Le Brun's commercial interests as a dealer tarnished any hopes at a grander role in the Royal Academy, which the royal administration prided as an institution of "pure art" unsullied by commercial dealings. Le Brun's reputation evidently cast a shadow over his wife, the celebrated portrait painter Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun, favored by Marie Antoinette.⁴² After the painter left France with their daughter in 1789, her name was added to the list of condemned émigrés. Le Brun

fig. 8 Angels Swinging Censers. French, Collegiate Church of Saint Etienne de Troyes, ca. 1170. Stained glass, $18\frac{1}{2} \times 17\frac{7}{16}$ in. (47 × 44 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Ella Brummer, in memory of her husband, Ernest Brummer, 1977 (1977.346.1)

published several public defenses of his wife to no avail; the couple divorced in 1793.⁴³ Though it is unclear whether Le Brun truly espoused the ideals of the Revolution or merely sought to escape political censure, he joined the many egalitarian arts organizations that had been spearheaded by his ally David, including the Commission temporaire des arts. Regardless of his true motivations, the Revolution provided the dealer with an opportunity at public reinvention, evidenced by the opinionated pamphlets he published during the period, alongside his more “serious” work on paintings collections. Given his expertise as a connoisseur, he remained bitter that Jean-Marie Roland, the Girondin minister of the interior, had not invited him to become a member of the committee that oversaw the opening of the museum.

The fiercely contested model for the modern public museum as we know it, according to Andrew McClellan, emerged out of the revolutionary atmosphere of 1789. The comte d’Angiviller first conceived the idea of opening the royal collections to the public at the Louvre palace at the end of the ancien régime. The Musée Central des Arts only officially opened its doors

on August 10, 1793, the same day as the Festival of National Unity. Together, these events were to inaugurate the first anniversary of the storming of the Tuileries, a day marked in republican calendars as the first day of Year One and the last day of despotism.⁴⁴ Though the king’s collection formed the backbone of the new museum, it was supplemented by spoils from the revolutionary wars, royal confiscations, and émigré seizures, along with the remnants of vandalized monuments. The tombs, architectural fragments, and objects preserved by Lenoir at the convent of the Petits Augustins had originally been held there temporarily, the location serving as a depot, a kind of off-site storage for the official museum at the Louvre. A dialectic of destruction *and* preservation, one intimately tied to the revolutionary politics of the time, shaped the collections of the museum from the outset. This complex inheritance is one that museums like The Met must grapple with to this day.

At the center of the cultural maelstrom over the inaugural display of the Louvre—of what to include and how to arrange it—stood Le Brun and the minister Roland, locked in a fierce battle. Less than two months after the storming of the Tuileries, the Girondin minister of the interior had reignited plans to establish a public museum at the Louvre. In October 1792, he chose a six-member commission in charge of organizing the works of art, in a display that would instruct the public and artists, all the while “becoming the central attraction of enlightened amateurs and men of pure hearts who in savoring the delights of nature, still find the charms in its most beautiful imitations.”⁴⁵ Such a display, however, did not entail hanging paintings by school, artist, or chronology in a scientific system championed by Le Brun, but in a picturesque arrangement that would please the senses of the viewers. Though the details of the debate between Le Brun and Roland are beyond the scope of this article, Edouard Pommier has argued that Roland essentially viewed the museum not as “a history book,” but as “a beautiful book of images, which is enough to leaf through for pleasure.”⁴⁶ Such a view put him in direct contrast to Le Brun, and by extension David, the latter declaring: “The Museum is not supposed to be a vain assemblage of frivolous luxury objects that serve only to satisfy idle curiosity. What it must be is an imposing school.”⁴⁷ Following such criticism, the Louvre was rearranged again to suit more radical tastes. Yet the political purifications that took place under the Jacobin faction paradoxically transformed the museum into a space of neutrality. The museum functioned as the only alternative location for works of art that had been saved from





fig. 9 Jean-Baptiste Pierre Le Brun (French, 1748–1813). *Self-portrait*, 1795. Oil on canvas, 51½ × 39 in. (131 × 99 cm). Private collection

destruction but displaced, and its power, writes McClellan, “to elide original meanings and to substitute for them new aesthetic and art historical significances . . . is an attribute of museums first recognized and exploited during the Revolution.”⁴⁸ Such neutralization may have saved many religious paintings and those containing the traces of the monarchy that arrived at the Louvre. However, the expulsion of luxury rendered it a volatile and still active symbol of the past; this included the Sèvres vases that had appeared in an earlier iteration of the museum that were removed when the Louvre was reorganized during the Terror.⁴⁹

In an imposing school of art that sought to provide a patriotic education, what could France’s new citizens possibly learn from porcelain, and what one critic described as “the luxurious apartments of satraps and the great, the voluptuous boudoirs of courtesans, the

cabinets of self-styled amateurs?”⁵⁰ Scholarship on the early days of the Louvre has tended to neglect the ambiguous place of luxury in the didactic context of the museum. The assumption, based on statements like David’s, is that such rarities, which had operated as private but nonetheless visible forms of cultural power in the ancien régime, had been expelled *tout court* from the didactic and moralizing discourse of the museum. Nonetheless, a brief glimpse at a publication by Le Brun criticizing the Louvre reveals that alternative visions mapped out a place for luxury.

In 1795, or year III, after Le Brun had been removed from the temporary commission for squabbling with another member, he published *Ideas on the Disposition, Arrangement, and Decoration of the National Museum*. The pamphlet built upon earlier ideas that had been published in January 1793 for building a “Museum, composed of all the rare and precious objects belonging to the former king and emigres. This Museum must efface all the other establishments of its kind; moreover, I say that it must honor the Republic, it must enrich it.”⁵¹ While the earlier publication was more polemical in nature, Le Brun clearly viewed the second text as important, suggested by its appearance in his self-portrait displayed the same year at the Salon of 1795 (fig. 9).⁵² Arguing that the museum’s works should be classified according to school, he divided works into nine sections. These sections would unfurl in a sequence that began with an antechamber, a space for Egyptian monuments, Greek and Italian paintings organized by school, Greek and Roman sculpture, and Northern old master paintings, divided chronologically and by artist. The ensuing five sections included a space for Gothic monuments, early French painting, ornaments and furniture, modern sculpture, then painting. Most surprising was the ninth and final section, in the pavilion of the national museum. This would be “decorated with all the curiosities and products of the arts of Japan, China, the Indies, our own Sèvres porcelain, works in ivory, agate, and all the other objects that are precious by their materials, forms, colors, or rarity.” Le Brun ends by adding that the room would be the wonder of the enlightened nations of Europe: “And what an annual treasure this priceless depot would be worth to the republic!”⁵³

Certainly, Le Brun’s spatial divisions depended upon prevailing conceptions of culture and history, divided according to a Eurocentric vision of Enlightenment progress (one not entirely different from our own museological spaces today). Beginning with ancient Egyptian culture and moving through Greece and Rome, the galleries terminate in a chronological



Le Rollier à long brins d'Afrique, mâle. n. 25.

Barrois delin.

De l'imprimerie de Roussel.

Grise sculp.

fig. 10 Jacques Barraband (French, 1767–1809). “Le Rollier à long brins d’Afrique, mâle,” plate 25 from Levaillant 1806, vol. 1. Hand-colored engraving, 20 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 13 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (52.5 × 34.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Mrs. Charles Wrightsman, 2019 (2019.282.34)

fig. 11 François Levaillant (French, 1753–1824), Jean Benjamin de La Borde (French, 1734–1794), J. Perrier (nationality and dates unknown), Willem Van Leen (Dutch, 1753–1825), and Johann Friedrich Lebrecht Reinhold (German, 1744–1807). *Partie Méridionale de l’Afrique depuis le Tropique du Capricorne jusqu’au Cap de Bonne Espérance contenant les Pays des Hottentots, des Cafres et de quelques autres Nations*, 1790. Hand-drawn map with wash and ink, 72 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 105 $\frac{1}{16}$ in. (183 × 267 cm). Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris (GE SH 18 PF 114 DIV 2 P 26)

progression with the later work of modern artists. Which raises the question: why does porcelain arrive last? The place he reserves for rarities like “our own Sèvres” is ambiguous. For he describes the works as “decorating” the museum, rather than being hung ceremoniously like paintings, or installed like sculptures. While this last section indicates the inferior status of the decorative arts compared to the antiquities and old masters of the museum, it is also the one location where objects from multiple cultural origins commingle and collide, in a pavilion shaped by rarity and material effects, rather than disciplined by the rigor of curatorial expertise or connoisseurial science. Here, stern republican pedagogy dissolves into wonder. And even as revolutionaries sought to expel the language of the foreign and strange, which had once been used to celebrate and consume sensual delights in the ancien régime, from the museum, it persisted in the final room of Le Brun’s ideal version.⁵⁴ In contrast to David’s imposing school, the site reserved for the decorative arts and porcelain is undisciplined by disorderly curiosity.

A NATURAL HISTORY OF DISPERSALS

Two opposing visions of culture stood at the center of the debate on the museums, one organized by pleasure and the other by a more didactic mission. Pommier writes: “The Museum of Le Brun and the museum of Roland. A museum for the history of art, and a museum for a beautiful panorama. One is tempted to add: a museum of the future and a museum of the past, a museum that inaugurates our own time of museums, and the museum that closes the circle of delectation.”⁵⁵

Ultimately, the elephant garniture did not have a place in either the museum of Roland or that of Le Brun: it appeared in neither the first version of the public museum, which opened in the summer of 1793, nor the later purified version orchestrated by David. In spite of Le Brun’s efforts to keep the garniture for the Louvre, the government had decided to give it to *citoyenne* Denoor, a Dutch seller of prints and curiosities, in 1794 in exchange for her ex-husband François Levaillant’s natural history cabinet, which was valued at 28,442 livres.⁵⁶ Born in Paramaribo in the Dutch colony of Suriname to French parents, Levaillant was a celebrated traveler, naturalist, and collector. He was one of the few Frenchmen who traveled to southern Africa and became a celebrity after publishing *Voyage de M. Le Vaillant dans l’intérieur de l’Afrique* in 1790 and *Second voyage dans l’intérieur de l’Afrique* in 1795, the same year Le Brun published his second pamphlet on the museum. He also issued an important volume on birds that featured lavishly colored engravings of specimens, paired with their French names rather than the scientific nomenclature used by Carl Linnaeus. A version illustrated by Jacques Barraband employed a hand-colored engraving technique known as *à la poupée* to capture the rich colors of the many specimens described by Levaillant (fig. 10).

Levaillant’s work as an explorer in southern Africa contributed to the new scientific discourses that emerged during the Revolution, notably anthropology. At first glance, there appears little of scientific interest in Levaillant’s adventurous, first-person accounts of encountering rare specimens of birds, mammals, and plants, as well as members of African tribes such as the Gonaqua, Xhosa, and Houzouana bushmen, whom he portrayed sympathetically (though nonetheless problematically) as “noble savages.”⁵⁷ In one of the most well-known passages of Levaillant’s writing, he described a flirtatious meeting with Narina, a woman of the Gonaqua tribe, to whom he offered gifts and exchanged words, before abruptly terminating the relationship.⁵⁸ Beyond his popular travel writings, Levaillant had offered a monumental map of southern Africa to Louis XVI, who had a penchant for cartography (fig. 11). Unusually, cartographic precision was coupled with sixty-six painted vignettes and five tableaux of the scenes that Levaillant had encountered, from rare birds and plants to tribes. And toward the lower right quadrant, near the part of the map marked “Comnassia Berg,” one can find an elephant, returned to its native habitat. Offered to the sovereign of France, the map intimates that Levaillant’s aims were far from



fig. 12 Jean Antoine Alavoine (French, 1778–1834). *Project for a Fountain at the Place de la Bastille*, ca. 1808. Watercolor on paper, 19 3/4 × 26 3/4 in. (50.2 × 67 cm). Musée du Louvre, Paris (INV23521-1-recto-folio5)



innocuous, momentary encounters with the Other. They served instead as the starting point for colonial reconnaissance missions, of combing the continent for potential riches even after harvesting the bodies of the enslaved. As a member of the *Société des Observateurs de l'homme*, Levaillant sought to use his encounters with the African tribes to establish the foundations of the science of man, a science that would increasingly depend upon racial hierarchies of difference.⁵⁹ The explorer's commercial interests also became clear when he sought to return to Africa as part of the *Société d'Afrique Intérieure*, a rival enterprise to British attempts to explore the interior of Africa.⁶⁰ While some scholars have pointed out that Levaillant offered much more sympathetic, "humanitarian" portrayals of the people he encountered during his travels, it is also worth recalling the grislier aspects of his campaign: hunting and eating elephants. It is plausible that some of the elements of the natural history collection acquired by the revolutionary government may have even been the remnants of Levaillant's hunting campaigns. These gruesome aspects of his adventuring in Africa lends particular irony to the bartering of his

natural history collection for the Sèvres elephant vases. Though his collection was acquired in the hope of educating and elevating the French nation in the natural sciences, the specimens were also the remnants of a darker campaign of extermination, brutality, and extinction, waged by one of the founding members of the "science of man" during the Revolution.

Was the porcelain garniture really worth the treasures discovered and collected by Levaillant? Evidently his ex-wife did not view the porcelain as so important, selling off the two elephant porcelain vases and matching ship potpourri at an April 1797 auction, purchased by who else but Le Brun.⁶¹ The garniture was only briefly in the hands of Denoor before it was sold once more, and their sale in the post-revolutionary period seems but a sordid prelude to a later, more distinguished provenance that included the wealthy nineteenth-century banker Sir Charles Mills and Samuel H. Kress, before their ultimate arrival at The Met.⁶² Nonetheless, the unusual bartering between a newly formed government rich with porcelain yet strapped for cash and the divorced printseller reveals the ways in which the political circumstances of the Revolution opened up porcelain to

broader systems of value and meaning. No longer the possession of elegant princes or a part of elegant ensembles, the garniture, once valued for its sensual pleasures and artificial delights, became the monetary equivalent of a natural history collection prized by revolutionaries for its didactic possibilities. And while elephants may have symbolized the rare and exotic delights of the menagerie available only to royalty in the ancien régime, they came to acquire different meanings in the revolutionary period. For just a year after Le Brun had purchased the elephant garniture, France saw the arrival of two live elephants, Hans and Parkie, taken, or “liberated,” from the collection of the Dutch stadtholder William V. They became symbols of France’s imperial ambitions and military conquest.⁶³ After Napoleon crowned himself emperor, the elephant was chosen as a symbol of imperial France, in the form of a colossal fountain proposed on the site of the Bastille beginning in 1808 (fig. 12). The many iterations of the unbuilt monument became an avatar of the Napoleonic regime’s orientalist fantasies and colonial ambitions, and ultimately a sign of its monstrous military failures, haunting successive generations with what has been described as an “éléphantasmagorie.”⁶⁴

Studying the Sèvres porcelain garniture in the revolutionary context reveals the ways that the politics of dispersal and dispossession played a key role in

transforming porcelain from a luxury of elite regard and possession into an object of contestation. The language of rarity and curiosity that had helped fuel the desire for Sèvres porcelain under the reign of Louis XV was replaced by a political agenda that emphasized the moral and didactic uses of art to educate the new public. The aim of the present study of the elephant garniture is to initiate an honest conversation on the urgent need for museums to stage critical interventions of the collection through different frameworks, forms of historical research, and institutional histories that move beyond connoisseurship or provenance, opening onto deeper engagements with the politics of collecting. The work of decolonization depends not only on bringing outside voices or examination of geographies uncharted, but also on a rigorous practice of questioning the scholarly assumptions upon which the nature of the encyclopedic museum collection and its claims to cultural authority have been based. Thinking about objects from their historical points of departure will, to borrow an expression from Lisa Lowe, allow us to “reconstellate” worlds and moments of connection, rather than simply reconstruct the past as a foregone conclusion.

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NOTES

- 1 On the history of the French decorative arts collection at The Met, see Kisluk-Grosheide and Munger 2010.
- 2 For the now classic work on the sociology of taste, see Bourdieu 1987.
- 3 On the Bastille, see Lüsebrink and Reichardt 1997.
- 4 “Nous apprîmes le mardi 14 juillet au soir à Chantilly que les révoltés s’étaient emparés de la Bastille; nous eûmes de la peine à le comprendre, mais enfin cela était: je crus alors ne pouvoir me dispenser de me rendre le lendemain avec mes enfants auprès du Roi, dont au moins la couronne était en danger.” Quoted in Garnier-Pelle 2016, 29.
- 5 Ibid., 22.
- 6 Brunet 1972, 1.
- 7 Ibid., 2.
- 8 Rochebrunne 2003, 135.
- 9 Ibid., 134–36.
- 10 Munger 2018, 191.
- 11 See Milanovic 2010, 8.
- 12 Rochebrunne 2003, 137.
- 13 Cassidy-Geiger 2008.
- 14 For a history of the factory, see Brunet and Préaud 1978.
- 15 Ibid., 32.

- 16 Munger 2018, 190. For the plaster mold, see Savill 1988, 1:155.
- 17 Savill 1988, 1:192.
- 18 Droguet 2016, 31.
- 19 Rochebrunne 2003, 135; Garnier-Pelle 2016, 22.
- 20 Verlet 1953, 244. For a similar example made for the British market, see the Tapestry Room from Croome Court now at The Met (58.75.1–.22), which arrived like the Sèvres elephant vases from the Samuel H. Kress Collection. See Bryant 2020.
- 21 The commode by Leleu is today in the Wallace Collection, London. See Rochebrunne 2003, 136. On sets in interiors, see Hellman 2007.
- 22 Munger 2018, 190. On the Japanese birdcage example that inspired elephant vases at Meissen, see Cassidy-Geiger 2003.
- 23 On the menagerie and theories of governance, see Sahlins 2017.
- 24 Schmitt 2010, 117.
- 25 Ibid. The elephant skeleton is located today in the Muséum national d’Histoire naturelle in Paris.
- 26 Quoted in Beauhaire, Béjanin, and Naudeix 2014, 61. See also Martin 2019.
- 27 Rochebrunne 2002, 450.
- 28 Yang 2021.

- 29 Ibid. For a contrasting approach to Rococo and chinoiserie, see Rimaud and Laing 2019.
- 30 Réau 1994, 9.
- 31 Ibid., 234.
- 32 Quoted in translation by Stammers 2018, 18.
- 33 Stammers 2018.
- 34 On paintings restoration, see Etienne 2017.
- 35 Magny 1987, 58.
- 36 On the Dépôt de Nesle, see Wisner 1996.
- 37 Baulez 1987, 55. On the commission's role in the politics of the Louvre display, see McClellan 1994, especially 114–15.
- 38 Baulez 1987, 55.
- 39 Ibid., 53.
- 40 Pommier in Le Brun (1793) 1992, 75–76.
- 41 Ibid., 76.
- 42 On Vigée Le Brun, see Baillio, Lang, and Baetjer 2016.
- 43 Spieth 2017, 2.
- 44 See McClellan 1988. On the complexities of the republican calendar, see Shaw 2011.
- 45 Pommier in Le Brun (1793) 1992, 73.
- 46 Ibid., 85.
- 47 Quoted in McClellan 1994, 106.
- 48 Ibid., 113.
- 49 For examples of the Sèvres vases included in the original display, see Musée du Louvre 1793, especially 104–20.
- 50 Gabriel Bouquier quoted in McClellan 1994, 108.
- 51 “un Muséum, de le composer de tous les objets rares et précieux appartenans au ci-devant roi et aux émigrés. Ce Muséum doit effacer tous les autres établissemens de ce genre; je dis plus, il doit honorer la république, il doit l'enrichir.” Le Brun (1793) 1992, 7–8.
- 52 Spieth 2017, 131. The earlier publication was titled *Réflexions sur le Muséum national: 14 janvier 1793*.
- 53 “Et quel trésor annuel cet inappréciable dépôt vaudrait à la république!” Le Brun 1795, 17.
- 54 On the language of the foreigner in the context of revolutionary politics, see Wahnich 1997.
- 55 “Musée de Le Brun et musée de Roland. Musée pour une histoire de l'art, et musée pour un beau panorama. On serait tenté d'ajouter: musée de l'avenir et musée du passé, musée qui inaugure notre temps des musées, et musée qui ferme le cycle de la délectation.” Pommier in Le Brun (1793) 1992, 88.
- 56 Arch. Nat., F¹⁷ 1192⁹, pièce 173. For the garniture she received, see Baulez 1987, 53 and 56. For other works she received in exchange for the natural history cabinet, see Tournoux 1877, 65–66.
- 57 Huigen 2009, 122. See also Lloyd 2004.
- 58 On Levillant's encounter with the Gonaqua in image and text, see Glenn 2020.
- 59 Kilbourne 1982, 78–79.
- 60 Glenn 2020, 303.
- 61 As Rochebrunne (2003, 137) notes, it is plausible that Le Brun added the gilt-bronze mounts to the vase à oreilles at the Louvre, in an effort to “update” models that had fallen out of fashion at the end of the eighteenth century.
- 62 On other examples of Sèvres porcelain in the collection, see Roth 2002.
- 63 Lipkowitz 2013.
- 64 Beauhaire, Béjanin, and Naudeix 2014.

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Facsimiles, Artworks, and Real Things

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Facsimiles on paper became a ubiquitous part of museum collections in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, largely due to developments in photomechanical print processes, and in keeping with the progressive mission assumed by museums in the United States and Europe after the First World War. At the same time, conservative criticism of that democratizing tendency in the arts fomented considerable controversy over the inclusion of facsimiles in exhibitions. In recent years, scholarly attention has been paid to the role of plaster casts in the formation of many of the museums of this period. Less examined are facsimile works on paper, which made up a significant portion of The Metropolitan Museum of Art's early collection, along with other reproductions of works that were unattainable in the

fig. 1 Nina de Garis Davies (Scottish, 1865–1941). *Thutmose I and His Mother Seniseneb*. Facsimile. Tempera and graphite on paper, 32 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 27 $\frac{15}{16}$ in. (81.5 × 71 cm), 1925. Original: from Egypt, Upper Egypt, Thebes, Deir el-Bahri, Temple of Hatshepsut. New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, Joint reign of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III, ca. 1479–1458 B.C. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.137)

United States before the days of largesse from Gilded Age industrial and financial tycoons. Even as The Met began to acquire important original works of art, the curatorial and educational programs continued to exhibit and rely on facsimiles, especially those depicting wall paintings that remained in situ. The dual purpose of facsimiles—preservation and education—were missions at the core of the Museum upon its founding.

The formal inclusion of facsimiles in The Met's collection was made in the decade after the Museum was founded. In 1886, under the direction of Luigi Palma di Cesnola, The Met's first curatorial departments were established, and the reproductions in all mediums were held in the Department of Casts, where they remained until a reorganization in 1906. Copies of two-dimensional or low-relief works in the collection included prints using various print-making techniques, hand-drawn or painted copies on paper, rubbings, and eventually photographic and photomechanical reproductions. The facsimiles were

first exhibited in permanent galleries and later also loaned out as part of the Museum's extensive educational program.

This article begins with a look at the history of facsimiles in The Met and contemporary institutions, and seeks to define them through a discussion of three different facets of their role in the museum: as objects of preservation and, as such, exemplars of the evolving and complex role of conservation in museums; as objects of art themselves; and as objects of progressive-minded education. The main categories under discussion are facsimiles of ancient Egyptian tomb paintings, executed primarily with tempera on paper; facsimiles of wall paintings from Athens and Crete, done in tempera and watercolor on paper; and Chinese rubbings representing stone stelae, in ink on paper. The handmade, rather than photomechanical, production of these objects is important in relating the works to one another, and to the practice of conservators.

The discussion then turns to a broader examination of critical attitudes toward facsimiles and art restoration from the perspectives of art history, conservation history and theory, and science, where the development of scientific atlas illustration is particularly relevant. Due to their liminal status between artwork and copy, as well as their identification with the working class through the mode of their production and an association with mass culture, facsimiles and art restoration in general were the focus of a political, class-based opposition that affected the development of conservation as a field increasingly grounded in scientific methodology. The controversy over facsimiles and restoration was expressed through questions of authenticity and objectivity, revealing class tensions inherent in the conflicting ideas of the museum as a space for elite guardianship of culture and also for popular enjoyment and edification.

NOMENCLATURE

The name for this category of works in museum collections should indicate their historical context, process of production, or function, but as we will see when we begin to look into these elements, the terminology falls short. Works executed by the Graphic Section of The Met's Egyptian Expedition and similar Egyptian works in other institutions (fig. 1) have traditionally been called "facsimiles," or "copies." The watercolors and temperas of ancient Greek frescoes by Emile Gilliéron and his son were at times called "facsimiles," "copies," "reproductions," and "watercolors" by Gilliéron and by Met curator Gisela Richter, who acquired them. They



are now simply referred to as “drawings” or “water-colors,” and sometimes “replicas.”¹

The term “facsimile” generally indicates a simulacrum of the original object made with the intent of preservation and propagation, while a “copy” could be anything from an artist’s copy to a photocopy.² The terms “replica” and “reproduction” have more of a commercial connotation, and in addition have been applied more to three-dimensional copies of archaeological objects. Often, though, these terms were used interchangeably. In general, the argument against calling certain copies “facsimiles” was that the copies were not exact enough, in their color and contrast, materials used, or even accuracy of line and depiction.

The term “rubbing” is more straightforward, as it refers to the technique used to make the object rather

than its function. The traditional Chinese process of executing a rubbing, whereby a damp piece of paper meticulously applied to cover a carved surface is daubed vigorously with a flat brush coated with a heavy and somewhat dry black ink, creates a 1:1 representation of the original stone or brass object (fig. 2). The rubbing carries an imprint of that object as a matrix, in the same way that an etching is an imprint of the etched copperplate, for example. Through the process of direct transfer, a rubbing is closer to an exact copy than the hand-drawn Egyptian or Greek facsimiles. Although the nomenclature for this diverse group of hand-copied works on paper can be imprecise, identifying why and in what context these terms are used leads to an interesting discussion about the function and purpose of various kinds of facsimiles.

FACSIMILES AS OBJECTS OF PRESERVATION

Why argue that these objects from different art historical contexts—using different materials and techniques—are related in function? After all, the concerns and intentions of the artisan making the rubbing are distinct from that of epigraphists or artisans on an archaeological dig who must ask themselves, as did Charles K. Wilkinson, a curator of Egyptian art at The Met: “What are you copying? What it is like or what you think it was like?”³ These varied works have a common purpose, however: preservation of the original object by allowing it to be seen and appreciated, regardless of the artists’ original intention. In their primary function as objects of preservation, facsimiles are best categorized as one of many approaches within museum conservation practices.

The transference of the image from stone carvings or painted walls to the portable and practical medium of ink or paint on paper confirms the prioritization of the picture over the materiality of the object as that which must be saved and studied.⁴ This objective, somewhat counterintuitively, aligns the facsimile more with the interventive practice of restoration. Restoration seeks to halt the action of time on an object, or return the object to a previous, more “true” state. This approach is an alternative to more open or neutral conservation treatment options that allow for future change. When a facsimile is made, the original works are often presumed to be inaccessible, subject to degradation both natural and accelerated, including the human intervention that involved the copyists in the first place. The facsimiles are then presented in the museum setting as eternal images, preserved from the effects of time.⁵



fig. 2 *Guanyin*. Rubbing, ink on paper, 20th century, depicting Qing dynasty stone carving of Guanyin based on painting by Zhou Xun. Original: Zhou Xun (Chinese, 1649–1729). Ink on paper, overall with mounting: 75 × 42 in. (190.5 × 106.7 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Miss H. C. Wagner, 1959 (59.195.2)

fig. 3 First chamber in the tomb of Nebamun and Ipuky, Thebes. Photographed by The Met's Graphic Section. Published in Wilkinson and Hill 1983, 19, fig. 12



fig. 4 Nina de Garis Davies. *Brickmakers Getting Water from a Pool, Tomb of Rekhmire*. Facsimile. Tempera and graphite on paper, 19 ¹/₈ × 17 ¹⁵/₁₆ in. (48.5 × 45.5 cm). 1925. Original: Egypt, Upper Egypt, Thebes, Sheikh Abd el-Qurna, Tomb of Rekhmire (TT 100). New Kingdom, Dynasty 18, reign of Thutmose III–early Amenhotep II, ca. 1479–1425 B.C. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1930 (30.4.89)

Facsimiles of Egyptian Tomb Paintings

An article by curator Ambrose Lansing previewing the 1930 Met exhibition “Copies of Egyptian Wall Paintings” noted that while the original tomb paintings were “bound to fade” regardless of preservation efforts, The Met’s Egyptian Expedition had undertaken the “next best thing” in allowing the paintings to be studied by a widespread body of scholars via accurate copies on paper.⁶ Still today, these painted facsimiles, many depicting scenes of everyday life and ritual in ancient Egypt that are not described in texts, are valued for what they can tell Egyptologists about the culture and practices of that civilization. Unlike The Met’s collection of facsimiles of wall paintings from Athens and Crete by Emile Gilliéron and his son, which were off view for many years, the Egyptian facsimiles have been displayed almost continuously since they came into the Museum. Another catalogue was published following the 1983 completion of a reinstallation of the collection that began in 1959.⁷

Nina de Garis Davies, epigraphist and artist of The Met’s Egyptian Expedition team along with her husband, Norman, who led the Graphic Section from 1907 to 1937, produced the largest percentage of the painted facsimiles of wall paintings in The Met’s collection. Davies was lauded as an expert copyist, so much so that when she passed away in 1965, a colleague lamented that a brilliant tradition of recording had “died with her, but in splendour.”⁸ Aided by a system of mirrors to convey natural light into the tombs (fig. 3), Davies used a small amount of tracing on tracing paper to establish the basic outlines of the wall paintings, and then transferred the lines with carbon paper to the thick sheets of paper used for the finished drawing.⁹ She went over these lines with graphite (any lines from the carbon transfer are too insignificant to be detected in visible or infrared light) and made the rest of the painting

by eye, applying colors in the same sequence as the tomb painter.

As Davies was perfecting her technique, she proceeded with trial and error to find the perfect medium to depict the tomb wall paintings. She was persuaded by a colleague to settle on tempera because it gave the best indication as to the wall surface, using pigments that she determined through experimentation were colorfast upon light exposure (fig. 4). She also developed her own method, using “indeterminate washes,” to depict damage and losses to the original wall paintings while not distracting the eye and still presenting a cohesive and clear image of the extant painting.¹⁰ This artistic discernment was a significant advantage over photography, which could be harder to read due to its undifferentiated surface,¹¹ and would not have met the standards for scholarship established by the Graphic Section.¹²

Lansing’s article goes further than describing the facsimiles as a means to exhibit Egyptian wall paintings to a wider audience. It casts the facsimiles as the truest representation of the Egyptian artists’ original intent. Given that opened tombs were exposed to damage from the environment and human interaction, the facsimiles became the primary method of preservation of the paintings, in essence replacing them.¹³ The makers of The Met’s Egyptian facsimiles deftly utilized their materials and artistic techniques to most accurately depict what they observed on the excavated tomb walls. They developed a method of illustration that could be easily read and interpreted by Museum scholars and visitors.



FACSIMILES AS ART OBJECTS: CONSIDERATIONS OF TIME, INTENTION, AND INTERPRETATION

Facsimiles are objects of preservation, but they may also be considered works of art, especially when displayed in an art museum. Arthur C. Danto's incisive 1973 essay "Artworks and Real Things," from which the title of this article is derived, explores how the contextualization of a work of art, including time of creation, materiality, venue of display, and intention, informs whether or not we think of it as art. He resolves to "see whatever it is, which clearly does *not* meet the eye, which keeps art and reality from leaking hopelessly into one another's territory," and notes that the temporal context plays an essential role.¹⁴ The age and historical importance of the group of facsimiles in The Met also affect how we characterize and value them today, leading to renewed interest. Facsimiles in recent years have been taken out of storage at The Met and other institutions for rediscovery through study and display.

In addition to getting the timing right, in order for the art world to accept a work of art, according to Danto, it needs to be subjectable to interpretation:

"It owes its existence as an artwork to this, and when its claim to art is defeated, it loses its interpretation and becomes a mere thing."¹⁵ Using this framework, it is difficult to argue that a facsimile of a wall painting in a tomb from Thebes by Nina de Garis Davies could be open to an independent interpretation, and thus exist autonomously as a work of art.

But yet, especially when compared to photo-mechanical copies, the collections of facsimiles made by hand on paper, including the Egyptian and Greek facsimiles as well as the Chinese rubbings, have certain qualities that could be ascribed to artworks. They are often inextricably linked to the artisan who made them, implying an appreciation of artistic skill and intent. For example, the facsimiles by the Gilliérons were products of a successful business built on their names.¹⁶

Most importantly, although the intention was to create an accurate copy of the original, the makers of the facsimiles employed interpretive artistic choices toward that end. Recognition of the creative and subjective nature of the facsimiles formed the basis of key arguments *against* their legitimacy as exhibition



fig. 5 Met Cast Collection Galleries, Wing B, Gallery 34; view facing northeast, including, at top right, Emile Gilliéron père's watercolor of Herakles Wrestling Triton from the Hekatompedon pediment in the Acropolis of Athens. Photographed on June 14, 1927. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives

fig. 6 Emile Gilliéron père (Swiss, 1850–1924). *Woman Carrying an Ivory Pyxis*, 1912. Facsimile of fresco from Knossos, Crete. Tempera and graphite on paper, 89 × 46 in. (226.1 × 116.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Dodge Fund, 1912 (12.128.4)



objects, just as recognition of the subjective nature of restoration treatments was raised by critics seeking to invalidate the practice, as will be examined later in this article.

The Gilliéron Facsimiles of Wall Paintings in Athens and Crete

Artistic choices abound in the production of these works by father and son archaeological restorers. In 1883, early in his career, Emile Gilliéron père was hired to produce drawings of recently discovered sculptures from the Acropolis of Athens (fig. 5). Rather than emulating the surface of the original works, he used varying densities of washes in the transparent medium of watercolor to indicate not only the original artist's work but also the effects of light and shadow on

three-dimensional objects, and losses due to flaking and abrasion.¹⁷ Gilliéron also made watercolor copies of the same sculptural groups in different scales for different clients.

Art historians have noted Emile Gilliéron père's excellent handling of watercolor and exuberant use of color, which was critical in interesting a popular audience in Greek polychromy.¹⁸ His artistic technique extended beyond what would have been required of a copyist. One of his colleagues wrote that "Gilliéron's sense of line was surer than that of color and that his copies reveal a subjective quality of which he was both conscious and never capable of entirely overcoming."¹⁹

In the case of the later copies of Minoan wall paintings from Knossos, the creative role of the Gilliérons, along with archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans, in discovering, reconstructing, and popularizing a Minoan aesthetic cannot be overstated (fig. 6). The replicas made during this period remain better known than original works from Knossos.²⁰ Unfortunately, scholarship has concluded that several of the Gilliérons' widely circulated reconstructions were well-intentioned misinterpretations of the original paintings. The Gilliérons imaginatively but inaccurately pieced together many of the fresco fragments found during the archaeological excavation.²¹ Some of their more drastic restorations had a distinctive style influenced by the fashionable imagery of the day: as the writer Evelyn Waugh quipped in 1929, their aesthetic displayed a "somewhat inappropriate predilection for the covers of *Vogue*."²² Part of what makes the Gilliéron facsimiles so compelling as objects of study and beautiful as works of art themselves is this mingling of copy and invention, delivered with great technical skill.

Chinese Rubbings

As a prolific aspect of Chinese art and an essential mode of its traditional dissemination and appreciation, Chinese rubbings have their own story to tell about the interaction between the artisan copyist and the original work. The rubbing technique, which requires many choices to be made by the artisan, including the type of paper and sizing used; the degree of cleaning out the lines of the original carving; the dampness of the paper; the amount and consistency of ink used; the amount of pressure applied with a brush to force the paper into crevices; and the method of daubing the ink, is conducive to producing works of inconsistent quality, even between rubbings from the same carving.²³ Variations such as the unusually heavy and dense ink application that can be seen in the lustrous eighteenth-century



example shown in figure 7 individualize the rubbing as the work of a particular artisan, sometimes for a specific patron.

Rubbings were made to be collected from the time of their first production, as early as the sixth century,²⁴ by public and private collectors and institutions, but have not generally been deemed works of art in their own right. Connoisseurs and scholars would be steeped in the historicity of the rubbing, through which significant indications of the life of the original object could be deduced via the development of a new crack visible in a particular rubbing, or the gentle erosion of the edges of carved lines seen in another. As with the facsimiles of Egyptian tomb paintings, scholars have noted that a good rubbing will depict delicate markings and fine cracks or other damages more effectively than a photograph.²⁵ A rubbing could have special value due to its rarity or its placement in the timeline of the carving's existence. The notion of the life of an object through time, and the expected degradation of the original work, is especially well appreciated in connoisseurship of Chinese rubbings.

fig. 7 Various artists. Qing dynasty (1644–1911), Qianlong period (1736–95), second half of the 18th century. China. Leaf from album in *Model Calligraphies from the "Hall of Three Rarities"* (Sanxitang) and the "Collected Treasures of the Stony Moat" (Shiqu Baoji). Set of rubbings mounted in thirty-two albums; ink on paper, each page: 11¼ × 7 in. (28.6 × 17.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Marie-Hélène and Guy Weill, 1984 (1984.496.1–32)

A rubbing can be considered a kind of restoration, a truer, more authentic representation of a carving that has since been worn down and diminished. It should be noted that the process of creating a rubbing—acting vigorously on the stone carving by scraping dirt out of the lines and pounding it with brushes and daubers—wears down the original object. This fact even further illuminates the relationship between the rubbing and the carving; the copy represents both a perceptual and material challenge to the authenticity of the real object.²⁶

Rubbings have not been traditionally considered exhibition objects by institutions such as The Met, although as with other facsimile types discussed here, there have been recent indications of reappraisal.²⁷ This shift requires collapsing some of the traditional hierarchies of art making, as well as an appreciation for the creative and subjective nature of their production and their value as autonomous authentic objects that also happen to be copies.

While we have determined that these derivative works on paper are not exactly artworks, we are also beginning to see arguments against considering them to be mere copies. Their status as copies is belied by the amount of subjectivity involved in their creation. And they are certainly not "real things" (to use Danto's phrase), as a copy cannot be the real thing. The fact that such objects resist simple classification accounts in part, as we will see, for the intense debate surrounding their exhibition in museums. We will also find that critiques of the validity of art restoration treatments are based around the same framework, as the restorer's subjectivity was seen as a challenge to the authenticity of the restored object.

In addition to their problematic indefinability, facsimiles represented a tension within the institution of The Met between its elite role as gatekeeper of culture and its democratizing role in educating and uplifting the citizenry. Facsimiles were instrumental to art education influenced by the genteel tradition²⁸—the belief that exposure to high culture was essential for the betterment of the working classes—that greatly informed the early mission of The Met and persists to some extent today.

FACSIMILES AND ART EDUCATION

Easily portable, less precious than originals, and depicting important art forms that could not be seen by the vast majority of the public, reproductions were an essential part of the educational mission when The Met's Lending Collection was formed. Established in

fig. 8 Exhibition "Ancient Egypt: Its Life and Art," James Monroe High School, Bronx, New York. Photographed March 28, 1936. The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives

1907 under then Met president J. Pierpont Morgan, the Lending Collection included lantern slides, "photographs, color prints, facsimiles of engravings, etchings, and lithographs, and other reproductions"²⁹ as well as "duplicate pieces" of textiles and lace, casts, and stained-glass replicas of windows from Chartres Cathedral, initially for the purpose of aiding instructors in the Museum. Soon, however, the collection was lent out to lecturers, schools and other institutions, and United Service Organizations (USO) groups.³⁰ By 1941 the program was actively lending across the entire United States.

The Neighborhood Exhibitions program, which operated from 1934 to 1942 with participation from the Works Progress Administration (WPA), was another attempt to democratize access to the collection by sending small exhibitions to schools, churches, libraries, YMCA branches, and other venues around New York (fig. 8). Twenty-eight facsimiles of Egyptian wall paintings were featured in the Neighborhood Exhibition repertoire, as well as detailed drawings of arms and armor, and papier-mâché models of Egyptian

temples made by WPA artists. The exhibitions were deemed immensely successful in reaching "the crowded neighborhoods of the underprivileged portions of our population."³¹ While the Museum was furthering the association of facsimiles with teaching and underserved community outreach, the public had become accustomed to having copies of artworks in their own homes, in part for the purposes of signaling a certain level of sophistication and middle-class status.

COPIES, CONSUMERISM, AND CLASS

One cannot separate a consideration of facsimiles and copies in the context of the early decades of museum collecting from the larger cultural context in Europe and the United States—the explosion of reproduced images and subsequent rise of a modern mass culture.³² The ubiquitous chromolithograph, popularized by publishers like Currier & Ives and Louis Prang & Co., was a type of semi-mechanized reproduction technology. It was one of many techniques that sprang from



fig. 9 Louis Prang & Co. (American, 19th century). Facsimile of a watercolor by Winslow Homer (American, 1836–1910). *The Eastern Shore*, 1896. Color lithograph. Image 14½ × 20% in. (36.8 × 52.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1927 (27.93.2)

developments such as the invention of the rotary offset press, chemical discoveries like those in the field of colorants, and most importantly in the mid- to late nineteenth century, the invention of photography. These new technologies greatly increased the ability to accurately reproduce two-dimensional works of art and produce massive runs for wide distribution to meet the new high demand for affordable prints (fig. 9). Reproductions and facsimiles therefore embody the tense relationship that persists to the present day between the elitist idealism inherent in the conceptualization of the first U.S. museums, which sought to elevate and educate through the influence of high culture, and the commercialism associated with the middle classes that was necessary to further those aims.

What followed the advancement of image reproducibility in the twentieth century was a crisis of authenticity that related not only to technology but also to class and political anxieties.³³ Within critical debates about the role of the facsimile in museum collections and exhibitions from the 1920s into the second half of the century, the main areas of contention were: 1. reproductions were of poor quality, insufficient as stand-ins for the original; 2. reproductions relied too much on the subjective decisions of the (working-class) printmaker or artisan; and 3. the availability of reproductions of art devalued and threatened the original art, particularly for people poorly educated or otherwise unable to differentiate between them.

One essay series in the pages of the Hamburg journal *Der Kreis* from 1929 to 1930, known as the “Facsimile Debate,” is particularly useful to illustrate

the various perspectives at play in criticism of the exhibition of facsimiles in the museum. What is truly striking, but not surprising given the connection we have established between facsimiles and the mission of preservation, is that the same arguments were put forth in criticism of facsimiles and criticism of restoration, and the same solutions were proposed in response.

The “Facsimile Debate” and the Problem of Subjectivity

The essay series that came to be known as the “Facsimile Debate” was inspired by the May 1929 exhibition “Original und Reproduktion” at the Kestner Gesellschaft in Hannover, where the most technologically advanced reproductions were hung next to original works, challenging viewers to discern the difference. Proponents of the inclusion of facsimiles in museum collections saw them as essential to the mission of the museum itself: not only to preserve access to works of art not available to the average citizen, but also as a form of preservation of the original objects themselves. Hannover’s Provinzialmuseum director Alexander Dörner’s contribution was perhaps the most emphatic in advocating for a role for facsimiles in the museum amid the acceleration of industrial modernization as a way to make art accessible to the largest audience.³⁴

Within the anti-facsimile contingent, some participants in the *Kreis* debate argued against the promotion of facsimiles by taking revealingly political positions. Max Sauerlandt, director of the Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe in Hamburg, derided the “communist” spirit behind reproductions.³⁵ For critics such as Kurt Karl Eberlein, photoreproductive facsimiles were tantamount to forgeries, as was any form of restoration.³⁶

There is a familiar thread of resistance on this side of the debate, to the democratizing of access to art via the argument that such access, in the form of facsimile production, essentially cheapened the original object. The devaluation was often explicitly associated with the class of the practitioner, in the case of restorers, or the audience, in the case of facsimiles. It is important to note that in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, the occupation of conservator, traditionally called restorer, was largely held by working-class artisans. As we have seen, facsimiles, even those made for scholarly study, were associated with outreach to uninitiated museumgoers. Denigration based on class and standing did not form the entire critical basis for questioning the value of the facsimile, but it will be revisited in a discussion of the debate about the value of restoration as a whole.



Mechanization

Erwin Panofsky's essay response to the "Facsimile Debate" draws upon a distinction that is enlightening with respect to a corresponding dialogue about different approaches to restoration. Panofsky writes that he is ultimately in favor of facsimiles, as they had allowed a "poor student" like himself to obtain a sense of the artist's original intent.³⁷ But he expresses discomfort with the idea of a facsimile when he notes the degree to which even photomechanical reproductions incorporate subjectivity into their creation.

By means of comparison, Panofsky distinguishes the somewhat subjective photoreproductive process from music recording technology, which he describes as a more self-contained system. Allowing that Panofsky may have underestimated the amount of artistry involved in sound recording, he argues that in contrast, "the incompleteness of color photography requires the *insertion of the human hand* in the making of *facsimile reproduction*. A human being needs to choose the printing colors that are applied to the printing plates and then modulate these until they reach the definitive tonal value."³⁸ He also notes the role of the human decision-maker in other technical aspects such as cropping and scaling, which have a great effect on the final work. He concludes that "therefore, the *complete mechanization* of the reproduction process would settle this objection."³⁹ Panofsky's solution implies, conveniently, that the question of *whose* subjectivity is more or less acceptable in the role of mediating the essential values of a work of art would thereby be rendered irrelevant.

This goal of the excision of the human hand was also applied to a range of conservation treatments over the last century as the field became increasingly professionalized and scientific⁴⁰—whether or not such a goal is actually realistically attainable. It reached its apex, perhaps, in the 1960s and 1970s. Since then the attitude has gradually shifted in the other direction, with an appreciation of the subtle differences between works of art that require thoughtful human interpretation and a variation of approach to meet the object's individual needs. The evolution of this concept and how it has been applied to conservation and restoration can be related to a number of factors, including changing attitudes toward the concept of objectivity in the sciences, and issues of class and professionalism.

Parallel Historical Objections to Restoration

The basic scholarly rationale for restoration of losses was developed by art historians and critics between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth century. As we have

seen, the facsimile could be considered an extreme kind of *total restoration*, where the original object is in effect lost to the viewer, and critiques of the validity of restoration have closely paralleled arguments against the display of facsimiles in a museum setting. The objections speak to anxieties about authenticity and authority, and specifically who is allowed to interpret and apply that authority.

Arguments acknowledging the value of restoration treatment have been largely based on the concept of the "unity of the whole" for a work of art, which is threatened when damages occur such as losses, abrasions, or drastic color shifts occur.⁴¹ Despite some misgivings, curator and art historian Max J. Friedländer accepted that substantial losses in some artistic surfaces could "do away with the illusion of a spatial whole, and destroy the effect."⁴² The conservator's goal and skill are to return the sense of unity to a work of art that may be fractured or obscured, and their practical work is invested with unique powers of mediation and revelation of the object's true aesthetic nature.

With this in mind, the responsibility imbued in the restorer or facsimile artisan can be understood as grave indeed, and the many historical objections to restoration that invoke issues of class, standing, and professionalism of its practitioners (and viewers) can be better understood in light of this challenge to the control over culture and its interpretation. Further, when combined with an underlying intent to make rarefied and inaccessible art available to a mass audience, tensions inherent between the ideas of the museum as cultural gatekeeper and as a democratic institution serving to benefit all people become readily apparent.

One of the earliest and most well-known examples of a reactionary perception of immorality in restoration (as distinct from the practice of preventative conservation) was that promoted by John Ruskin. Ruskin was inspired by the Romantic movement and a personal taste for moss-covered ruins to become an impassioned critic against the restoration of architecture. Rather than restore damaged architecture, Ruskin inveighed: "Accept it as such, pull the building down . . . but do it honestly, and do not set up a Lie in their place."⁴³ On reproductions of works of art, Ruskin was also critical, making clear his opinion of copying and the copyist:

A certain number of dull persons should always be employed by a Government in making the most accurate copies possible of all good pictures; these copies, though

fig. 10 Theodor Hartig
(German, 1805–1880).
Plate 52 from Hartig 1851.
Collection of the Mertz
Library, the New York
Botanical Garden

artistically valueless, would be historically and documentarily valuable, in the event of the destruction of the original picture.⁴⁴

This negative view persisted into the twentieth century, as even some defenders of restoration were wary about restorers using their skills in service of forgery.⁴⁵ Such questions tended to place the blame largely on the demands of the art market rather than a moral failing among restorers but invoked suspicion nonetheless. Important to this discussion, the connection between restoration and commerce, and dishonest commerce at that, is less about a philosophy of art and more about a social critique.

An even more skeptical view of the character of restorers was widely held. For example, in a 1928 questionnaire posed to experts by the German bulletin

Die Kunstauktion (Art Auction) about the value of art restoration, all respondents agreed that restorers themselves were disreputable, using terms such as “irresponsible, high-handed creators, washers, hacks, overpainters, forgers, scoundrels,” etcetera, despite their largely being in favor of common restoration practices.⁴⁶

In the later twentieth century, James Beck, a Renaissance scholar and a sort of *bête noire* to conservators, often made this kind of point plainly. Writing about the idea of the “readability” of a work of art that could be compromised by damage or degradation, he jeered: “Behind the concept of readability, another factor appears: namely, the aura of democratization. After all, museums and restorers assume that the art object needs to be accessible to the lowest common denominator.”⁴⁷ These typical class-based objections to restoration and the arguments against the use of facsimiles exemplified in the “Facsimile Debate” were in alignment, and they demanded a response from the developing field of art conservation.

Scientific Objectivity and the Class of Restorers

Beginning in the post–World War II years, the de facto solution to criticism of this nature was to professionalize the field of conservation, including the adoption of scientific methods and apparatuses,⁴⁸ and a scientific approach emphasizing objectivity. In the practical sense, this meant attempting to emulate what Panofsky had prescribed in his ideal facsimile: complete mechanization, or in other words, reliance on technology and techniques that would efface the individualized hand and eye of the conservator. As the scholar of conservation theory Paul Philippot has remarked: “the expanding role of technological studies of works of art brought the practice of restoration and conservation from the level of traditional working-class artisanship to that of an exact science.”⁴⁹

The use of scientific methodology allowed the expansion of conservation practice to include not only treatment but also research: of an object’s condition, materials and techniques, and the materials that may be used by conservators.⁵⁰ Also, crucially, through association with scientific practices used in fields of chemistry, biology, and medicine, the conservator would be uplifted from the ranks of mere workmen and craftsmen. In order to achieve this, the field tilted toward embracing a reliance on a regularized, objective approach to treatment through which the individual judgment of the conservator would be deemphasized.

Although the perception of a process that is “scientific” is often synonymous with a process that is



“objective,” it is important to recognize objectivity in scientific practice as a historical concept rather than a foundational one. The concept of scientific objectivity arose in the mid-nineteenth century and was accompanied by a fervor for an ethics of self-denial.⁵¹ The field of atlas illustration, in which observed botanical and biological specimens are depicted for scientific reference, is particularly relevant to the discussion of facsimiles and restoration (fig. 10). Atlas illustration was similar to facsimile production in that the intent was to create an accurate representation of the original object. When objectivity in scientific practice became the rule, it resulted in rejecting the established eighteenth-century tendency to generalize or normalize illustrations of species as personally biased and overly interpretive. In pursuit of a moralized objectivity, atlas makers adopted a mechanical approach to the cataloging and illustration of species. They were aided by print-making techniques, where conventions regarding how to depict line, shadow, and texture have the tendency to impose a rationalizing language on image making.

Beginning in the early twentieth century, however, scientists began to reverse course and reevaluate the interpretive eye, recognizing that strict adherence to objectivity had produced new challenges, leaving a void of scientific guidance and understanding.⁵² The problems faced by a scientific atlas illustrator may be seen as analogous to the conservator’s and the facsimile artisan’s approach to an object. A conservator evaluating damage or degradation of a work of art, due to natural aging or another external action, is similar to an atlas illustrator observing a scientific specimen’s deviation from the norm. Both depend on an ability to recognize change, pinpoint cause and effect, and assess difference from a larger set of comparable objects.

At some point, *someone* has to determine what that norm is in order to truly understand what we are looking at—in the case of an aged or damaged work of art, perhaps through elucidating the artist’s original intent through observation and interpretation of underdrawings and other subtle physical evidence, or through consultation with works by the same artist or of the same time. Returning to the handmade facsimiles on paper, we may recall that Nina de Garis Davies’s copies of wall paintings were perceived to be more legible than those made with the comparatively objective eye of the photograph, due to the differentiation between damaged and intact surfaces that she was able to portray. We find that subjectivity is not as dispensable as was once thought.

Wilkinson’s question regarding facsimiles in Egyptology—“what are you copying? What it is like or

what you think it was like?”—will remain key for both facsimile artisans and restorers, as well as within the realm of scientific observation. It is important to recognize objectivity as a construct and a choice when it comes to conservation, not necessarily a canonical rule. This is not to say that scientific methods of analysis and application of treatment in conservation are not useful or could reasonably be discarded. Rather, the goal is to arrive at a fuller appreciation of the varied reasons these methods were embraced, in order to use them as far as they can serve us and the art. Today’s more nuanced understanding of the dynamic role of conservation is best articulated as a kind of creative mediation that “reconciles change responsive to the historic context,” as architecture conservator Frank Matero puts it.⁵³ This stance was made possible, in part, when conservators became more equally incorporated into the institution of the museum: first through the establishment of media-based conservation departments independent of curatorial oversight in the 1970s, and solidified as teaching and research departments staffed by conservators with graduate degrees and commensurate salaries in the 1980s and 1990s.⁵⁴ In the absence of class-based critiques, conservators became freer to exercise their valuable and unique skills of interpretation.

CONCLUSION

In addition to locating the ambiguous territory that facsimiles occupy between a subjective work of art and an objective copy, it has become clear that class tensions have had an immense impact on the field of conservation, with regard to the changing approaches to restoration treatment and the reception of facsimiles. The class dimension has been understated in histories of conservation theory, which tend to tell a straightforward narrative of self-propelled progression toward better understanding of the works of art and improved treatment techniques. Similarly, the trajectory of the status of facsimiles in museums, now undergoing renewed interest and study, has been cast as a result of the expansion of museum collections of original objects and then a sort of organic rediscovery and appreciation, rather than as a reflection of the class implications of displaying such works.

In all, the role of facsimiles in the museum is both fundamental and representative of a tension that perhaps cannot be resolved without abandoning adherence to entrenched categories of image making—art *versus* copy—or at least accepting a high degree of nuance in these categories. At the same time, the history of conservation, which has been somewhat betwixt

and between in the museum, subject to class critique and overcompensation by way of overreliance on scientific technology, can be seen as embodying those unresolved tensions between who makes art, who interprets it, and who sees it.

Concurrently, and arguably underlying the renewed appreciation for facsimiles on paper, museums in general and The Met in particular have entered an introspective phase. The Met has become self-critical of its role in a deeply stratifying society, repenting for its shortcomings in welcoming a diverse audience representative of the city it inhabits, and desiring a return, perhaps, to the more democratic impulses that inspired the Neighborhood Exhibitions program. Strolling through the Egyptian galleries past the walls of facsimiles, often packed with school groups and visitors of highly varied backgrounds and origins, we can now

better appreciate the history the facsimiles represent: a continuing recalibration of our ideas about what a museum is and whom it is for, all the more important at this moment.

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NOTES

- 1 R[ichter] 1910; Mertens 2019.
- 2 The Met's Paper Conservation Department uses the term "facsimile" to denote photomechanically produced copies of works too vulnerable to be exhibited, and the term "exhibition copy" for duplicate copies of original printed works, such as loans of reprinted wallpapers by Andy Warhol, that are *not actually considered the original work* and are to be destroyed after exhibition to maintain the value of the original work.
- 3 Wilkinson 1978.
- 4 This approach is in contrast to a strategy of prioritizing the preservation of the original material of the object above all, regardless of how it has been compromised. See the discussion of "material fetishism" in Muñoz Viñas 2005, 82–87.
- 5 The objects are now 100 to 150 years old, with their own rich histories, often requiring conservation themselves.
- 6 Lansing 1929, 321.
- 7 Wilkinson and Hill 1983.
- 8 Egyptologist and Met curator Cyril Aldred quoted in Caminos 1976, 22n60.
- 9 Strudwick 2004, 199.
- 10 Ibid., 200.
- 11 Brock 2000, 131.
- 12 Wilkinson and Hill 1983, 10.
- 13 Lansing's article previewing the 1930 exhibition (1929, 321) leans into the implication that in the making of facsimiles, not only the original wall paintings "may be preserved under more auspicious conditions" but that through this intervention, whereby tombs that were meant to be sealed for all time were entered and interfered with, the society and culture of ancient Egypt itself has been preserved. There are certain white supremacist underpinnings of this formative view of preservation within U.S. and European museums, particularly when it comes to collections from historicized nonwhite cultures, that should be duly noted here. Indeed it is one of the major indicators that the museum's role is deeply rooted in service of colonialism engendered by capitalism. The class tensions that are examined later in this article should be seen in light of this incontrovertible aspect of museum collecting, conservation, and mission.
- 14 Danto 1973, 6. In Danto's essay reality is the thing being depicted in an artwork, which the artwork needs to define itself against. Danto's primary purpose in the essay is to champion the work of Robert Rauschenberg as transcending the apparent dilemma between mimeticism and completely abstracted and nonimitative art that tends toward becoming "real things."
- 15 Ibid., 15.
- 16 Hemingway 2011.
- 17 This technique is in contrast to the later tempera paintings on paper, employing broad, flat areas of matte color that Gilliéron and his son used to depict Minoan wall paintings found in Knossos, Crete, beginning in 1900.
- 18 Mertens 2019, 24.
- 19 Ibid., referring to observations made by German archaeologist Gerhart Rodenwaldt.
- 20 Lapatin 2017, 83.
- 21 Herschman 2017, 26.
- 22 Quoted in Lapatin 2017, 79.
- 23 See Starr 2008.
- 24 Wu 2003, 30.
- 25 Sickman 1937, 10.
- 26 As Wu explains: "Compared to its rubbings, a stone carving is always both too old and too new. It is too old because it has long lost its original appearance and is no longer useful for an empirical, scientific observation. It is too new because it is still changing: one must always assume that it has deteriorated further since the last rubbing was taken from it." Wu 2003, 58.
- 27 See Pesenti 2015.
- 28 Stankiewicz 1999, 101–2.
- 29 Howe 1946, 206.

- 30 *MMAB* 1918, 205.
- 31 Bach 1938, 249.
- 32 See Orvell 1989.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 37.
- 34 Uchill 2015, 25.
- 35 *Ibid.*, 14. Regarding the use of facsimiles in the short-lived Spanish Communist government's efforts to educate the rural citizenry, see Otero-Urtaza 2011.
- 36 Uchill 2015, 23–24.
- 37 Panofsky (1930) 2010, 334.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 333.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 334.
- 40 For a discussion of “scientific conservation,” see Muñoz Viñas 2005, 74–78.
- 41 Brandi (1963) 1996, 340.
- 42 Friedländer (1942) 1996, 334.
- 43 Ruskin (1849) 1996, 322.
- 44 Ruskin 1906, 106–7.
- 45 Friedländer (1942) 1996, 334.
- 46 See Goltz 1999, 201.
- 47 Beck 2001, 2.
- 48 Including such structures as “examination verified by instrumentation, technical publications, the institution of academic training and societies, conferences, associations and journals with an international reach.” Cohn (2001) 2014, 487. Lawrence Becker and Deborah Schorsch (2010, 22) note that scientific methods and analysis first came into use at The Met, at least in objects conservation, during the directorship of Edward Robinson (1910–31).
- 49 Philippot (1989) 1996, 217.
- 50 Muñoz Viñas 2005, 70–71.
- 51 Daston and Galison 2007, 34.
- 52 “The rise of mechanical objectivity produced new kinds of instabilities. The triumph of the individual over the generic avoided the problems associated with spurious idealizations, but depictions of individuals made it much harder to handle (that is, identify or teach) the ‘normal variations’ that could arise in a species.” *Ibid.*, 317.
- 53 Matero 2013, 95.
- 54 See Deborah Schorsch, “Caring for The Met: 150 Years of Conservation,” accessed April 28, 2021, <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/conservation-and-scientific-research/conservation-stories/history-of-conservation>.

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Icon, Contact Relic, Souvenir: The *Virgin Eleousa* Micromosaic Icon at The Met

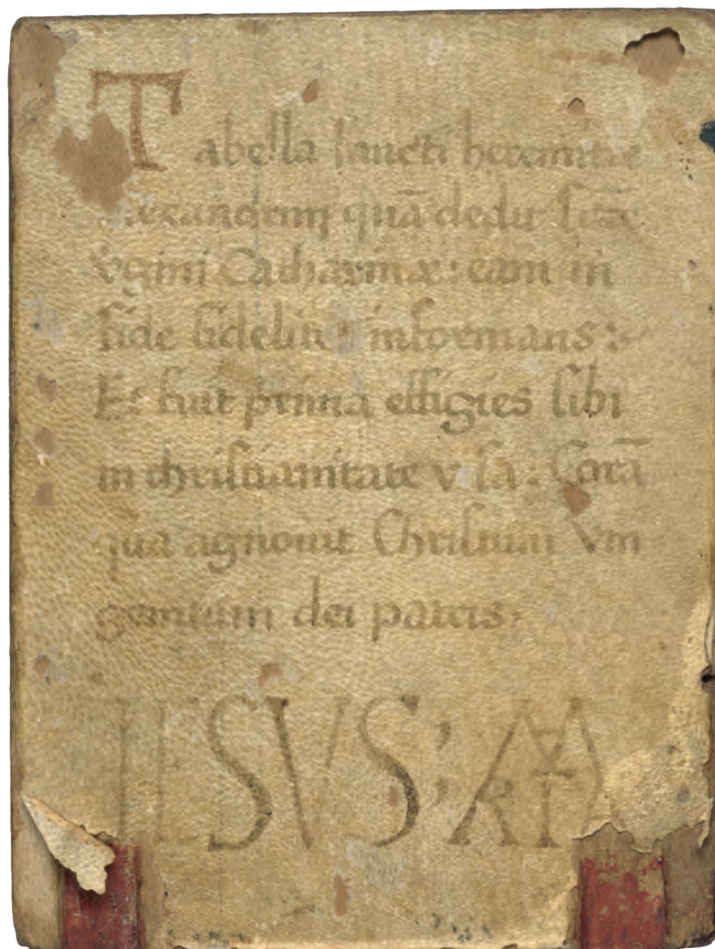
MARIA HARVEY

Among the glittering enamels, illuminated manuscripts, the ivories, and painted icons displayed in the Church Apse gallery in The Metropolitan Museum of Art sits the micromosaic icon of the *Virgin Eleousa* (Byzantine, early 1300s) (fig. 1).¹ Measuring only 11.2 × 8.6 × 1.3 centimeters, the icon astonishes the viewer when hit by a moving, shimmering light, which makes the gold glitter, the background recede, and the Virgin and Child become three-dimensional. Each tessera—many only a few millimeters wide—catches the light differently and the icon's complex and fractured surface becomes captivating. The delicate chrysography on the robes of the Virgin and Child matches the tenderness with which the figures place their cheeks against each other, and the elongated fingers of the Virgin about to caress her son. On the



fig. 1 Portable Icon with the *Virgin Eleousa*, early 1300s. Attributed to Constantinople. Miniature mosaic set in wax on wood panel, with gold, multicolored stones, and gilded copper, overall $4\frac{7}{16} \times 3\frac{3}{4} \times \frac{1}{2}$ in. (11.2 × 8.6 × 1.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of John C. Weber, in honor of Philippe de Montebello, 2008 (2008.352)

fig. 2 Reverse of the Portable Icon with the *Virgin Eleousa* (fig. 1). Parchment label. Italian, 1450–1500.



reverse of the wooden tablet, a late fifteenth-century Italian label (fig. 2) identifies it as the icon that converted Saint Catherine of Alexandria (early fourth century) to Christianity. How did a fourteenth-century icon become a fourth-century relic in the mind of its fifteenth-century viewers?

The micromosaic was first displayed at The Met during the 2004 exhibition “Byzantium: Faith and Power (1261–1557)” and was donated to the Museum four years later by John C. Weber.² Previously, the *Virgin Eleousa* had been in a British private collection and little is known of its history before the late 1980s. In 2007, the owner’s daughter wrote to The Met stating that her father had discovered it in an antique shop in Italy, where a colleague had bought it for him as a gift.³ Any further information regarding the object’s provenance remains unknown. With no evidence outside of the artwork itself and the label attached to its back, this article studies an object that is detached from its place of production and subsequent contexts in which it functioned and was valued. The methodology is comparative in order to reconstruct a probable context and chronology for the micromosaic. Setting aside the

possibility that the icon’s association with Saint Catherine may have been manufactured, this article explores how the polyvalence of micromosaics authenticated the *Virgin Eleousa* as a contact relic of Saint Catherine.⁴

The discussion starts with an overview of Italian collecting habits, showing that Byzantine icons were simultaneously prized as reliquaries, relics, devotional icons, works of art, and historical artifacts and that these categories were often blurred. The article then argues that the *Eleousa*’s mosaic surface was not only central to its appeal, but also confirmed its early Christian date and Eastern origins, owing to a complex set of visual associations in which the icon acts as a sample of, a quotation of, and a metonym for the East. For fifteenth-century Italians, this late Antique, Eastern origin—intended as the icon’s place of production and acquisition, and as the spatial setting of the Catherinian narrative—was shaped by travel books and literature, frescoes, and panel paintings.

ICON AS COLLECTIBLE

Palaiologan (1259–1453) micromosaic icons were popular during the Italian Renaissance, when they were

fig. 3 *Christ Pantokrator*, 1150–75. Attributed to Constantinople. Miniature mosaic, 21¼ × 16⅞ in. (54 × 41 cm). Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence (3 MO)

collected as relics, reliquaries, devotional icons, artworks, and historical artifacts. Eminently portable because of their small size, micromosaics could be found in large numbers in both church treasuries and private collections. Prominent, powerful patrons such as Lorenzo de' Medici, Niccolò Niccoli, Pietro Barbo (Pope Paul II), and Cardinal Basilios Bessarion owned more than a dozen each, attesting to their desirability. Of the forty-five surviving examples, one-third are or have been attested in Italy.⁵ The number of micromosaics on the peninsula was almost definitely much higher, as another fifty are mentioned in inventories.⁶ Few of them can be matched with the documentary evidence: of the fourteen once in the Medici collection, we can securely identify only the *Christ Pantokrator* (1150–75) now in the Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence (fig. 3).⁷ The mobility of these objects makes the study of their provenance particularly complex. For instance, scholars are still debating whether the *Christ Pantokrator*, which Pope Sixtus IV donated to Philippe de Croy, lord of Chimay, in Belgium in 1475, should be identified as one of the seven micromosaic icons that Bessarion had bequeathed to the Vatican a few years prior.⁸

Many micromosaics were in church collections, where they remain today.⁹ Notable examples include the Man of Sorrows in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and the *Christ Chalkites* in Santa Maria in Campitelli,



both in Rome; the *Saint Demetrius* in the Museo Civico Archeologico, Sassoferrato (previously in Santa Chiara); and the *Virgin Eleousa* in the Seminario Patriarcale in Venice (previously in Santa Maria della Salute).¹⁰ As a general rule, private collections often held up to a dozen micromosaics, while most treasuries owned just one. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Byzantine icons moved regularly between secular and ecclesiastic collections, as in the Chimay example, and could be found in major centers such as Rome, Florence, and Venice and in smaller ones like Palermo, Nicosia (Enna), and Galatina (Lecce). And yet, across these different contexts, micromosaics were collected for remarkably similar reasons.

There is little that can be said with certainty about the *Virgin Eleousa*, except that it was considered a contact relic of Saint Catherine of Alexandria. A “contact relic” is holy matter—dust, water, flowers, pieces of cloth, herbs, everyday objects, clothes—that had touched a saint’s living or lifeless body, or their tomb. This crucial piece of information comes from the label on the icon’s reverse, which covers the entirety of the available space. Eight lines of neat humanist Latin read:

*Tabella sancti heremitae // [A]lexandrini qua<m> dedit
s<an>ctae // v<ir>gini Catharinae: eam in // fide
fide<um> informans: // Et fuit prima effigies sibi // in
christianitate v[is]a: Coram<m> // qua agnovit Christum
uni//genitum dei patris. // JESUS: MARIA.*

A small painting belonging to the holy hermit
Alexandrinus which he gave to the holy Virgin Catherine:
[as he was] initiating her [Catherine] in her devotion to
the faith; And it was the first image seen [by her] in [her]
Christianity: in the presence of which she acknowledged
Christ [as] the only begotten son of God the Father.
Jesus: Mary.

Jonathan J. G. Alexander dated the writing paleographically to the second half of the fifteenth century and restricted the geographic profile to the Italian peninsula. He compared the MARIA monogram to laical ones used in charters and papal bulls.¹¹ The label, made to be visible and clearly legible, identifies the icon as a fourth-century artwork that the hermit Alexandrinus had given to Saint Catherine as she converted to Christianity. Although relic labels are ubiquitous, this one is particularly interesting because of its large size and format, and because it announces that the icon not only had belonged to Saint Catherine, but also that it

fig. 4 Pacio and Giovanni Bertini da Firenze (both Florentine, act. 1325–ca. 1351). *The Conversion of Saint Catherine* bas-relief (1350–1400) in photograph taken before the 1943 bombing. Complesso Monumentale di Santa Chiara, Naples



was present and instrumental in a pivotal moment of her life, her conversion to Christianity.¹²

The episode of Catherine's conversion was a late medieval invention, and, significantly, it is not included in Jacopo da Voragine's *Golden Legend* (ca. 1260), the most popular compilation of hagiographies in the late Middle Ages.¹³ Although the episode was alluded to in the mid-thirteenth century, the first securely dated written source is in a Latin text from 1337 now in the Cistercian monastery of Kasheim, near Donauwörth in Germany.¹⁴ It told of a young Catherine who, keen to maintain her virginity, visited the hermit, who informed her of a worthy suitor and gifted her an image of the Virgin and Child to pray to. That night, Catherine had a vision of the Virgin and Child, in which she learned that she needed additional instruction before she could marry Christ. This version became canonical and quickly spread throughout Europe, with fourteenth-century pilgrims reporting that Catherine was born and grew up in Cyprus. In 1394, Nicola de Martoni located the saint's conversion on the island in front of Famagusta.¹⁵

Images of the conversion started appearing in Italian visual culture in the 1330s and remained surprisingly consistent for about one hundred years. Catherine is represented kneeling, praying to or kissing a portable icon that the hermit either holds or is handing over to her. The image is always of the Virgin and Child, with the figures half-length, similar to the *Virgin Eleousa*. The earliest depiction of the conversion is in the *Vita* icon of Saint Catherine (ca. 1330) by Donato and Gregorio d'Arezzo now in the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.¹⁶ Shortly afterward, the story appears in a miniature of 1343 by the Pseudo-Niccolò; in the Pacio

and Giovanni Bertini da Firenze bas-reliefs for Santa Chiara in Naples (fig. 4); in the wing of a diptych attributed to the Pseudo-Jacopino di Francesco; and in the frescoes by Andrea de' Bartoli in the chapel of Saint Catherine in the Lower Church in Assisi. In the following century, similar images can be found in San Clemente, Rome; in Santa Maria della Rocca, Offida (Ascoli Piceno); in the Franciscan Basilica of Santa Caterina, Galatina (Lecce); in the Oratory of Santa Caterina delle Ruote, Bagno a Ripoli (Florence); in the Oratory of San Giorgio, Padua; and in the Cathedral of Santa Maria Assunta, Parma.¹⁷ Although geographic profiles are hindered by survival rates, images of the conversion seem to have been popular throughout Italy. Combining this map with the one of the Italian locations of micromosaics shows the difficulty of identifying possible locations for the *Virgin Eleousa* in the quattrocento (fig. 5).

According to inventories, pilgrimage chronicles, and other documentary evidence, the vast majority of contact relics were things: the coals used in the martyrdom of Saint Lawrence; Saint Jerome's hat; Saint Hedwig's beaker, and the devil's stick with which he hit Saint Nicholas of Tolentino. Icons and other images, with the exception of those attributed to Saint Luke, seem to have been rarely considered contact relics.¹⁸ More often, images were valued for *doing* something: appearing in a vision, making it rain, curing a devotee.¹⁹ Notable exceptions are works of art such as the Saint Zenobius dossal in Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence, and the *Aniketos* icon in San Marco, Venice, both made of material that had become miraculous as a result of contact with a holy figure or their relics.²⁰ Simultaneously contact relics and cult images, the Saint Zenobius panel and the *Aniketos* defy easy categorization. As a contact

relic and an icon, the *Virgin Eleousa* raises similar ontological questions about the nature of cult images, relics, and icons.²¹

With the exception of *acheiropoieta* (literally, “not made by [human] hands”), scholars have mostly focused either on relics and reliquaries or on cult and miraculous images, neglecting icons and images that were considered relics in and of themselves. For instance, images attributed to Saint Luke the Evangelist have been studied from the perspective of cult and/or miraculous images, rather than as contact relics of the Evangelist.²² Although popular throughout the Middle Ages, many Byzantine icons were first attributed to Luke in the later fifteenth century.²³ Examples include the *Nikopeia* in San Marco; the Virgin and Child in the Santuario della Madonna di San Luca, Bologna; and two icons in Padua, one in the cathedral and another in Santa Giustina.²⁴ Interestingly, the Venetian chronicler Marino Sanudo the Younger (1466–1536) listed, among two hundred noteworthy relics in Venice, “La imagine della Beata Verzene, di musaico, fatta per man di San Luca,” that is, an image of the Virgin Mary, of mosaic, made by Saint Luke.²⁵ Although the (micromosaic?) icon does not survive, its existence demonstrates that icons/contact relics such as the *Virgin Eleousa* were

not exceptional in the religious landscape of quattrocento Italy.

Micromosaics seem to have been particularly prone to inhabiting this liminal space between relics, reliquaries, and images, as shown by two icons that became contact relics of early Christian saints and were incorporated into reliquaries in the Renaissance. The *Christ Chalkites* micromosaic in Santa Maria in Campitelli is currently set in an eighteenth-century wooden panel, which contains a relic of the Nail of the Cross, and is protected by what may have originally been a silver book cover, with a central image of the Crucifixion. Early eighteenth-century documentary evidence describes the ensemble as the portable altar of Saint Gregory Nazianzus (ca. 330–ca. 390) and indicates that it existed in a configuration similar to what we see today. It is probable that the micromosaic was first associated with Gregory Nazianzus in the Renaissance.²⁶ A couple of kilometers southeast, the famous *Man of Sorrows* in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme (fig. 6) was also placed into a reliquary.²⁷ The heraldry on its Italian frame indicates that it was donated to the basilica in the late fourteenth century, and Jack Freiberg has shown that it was placed into the current reliquary at the end of the quattrocento.²⁸ By this time,

fig. 5 Map of Italy showing cycles of the Life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria that include the scene of the conversion (green triangles), and the location of lost and surviving micromosaic icons in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (circles)

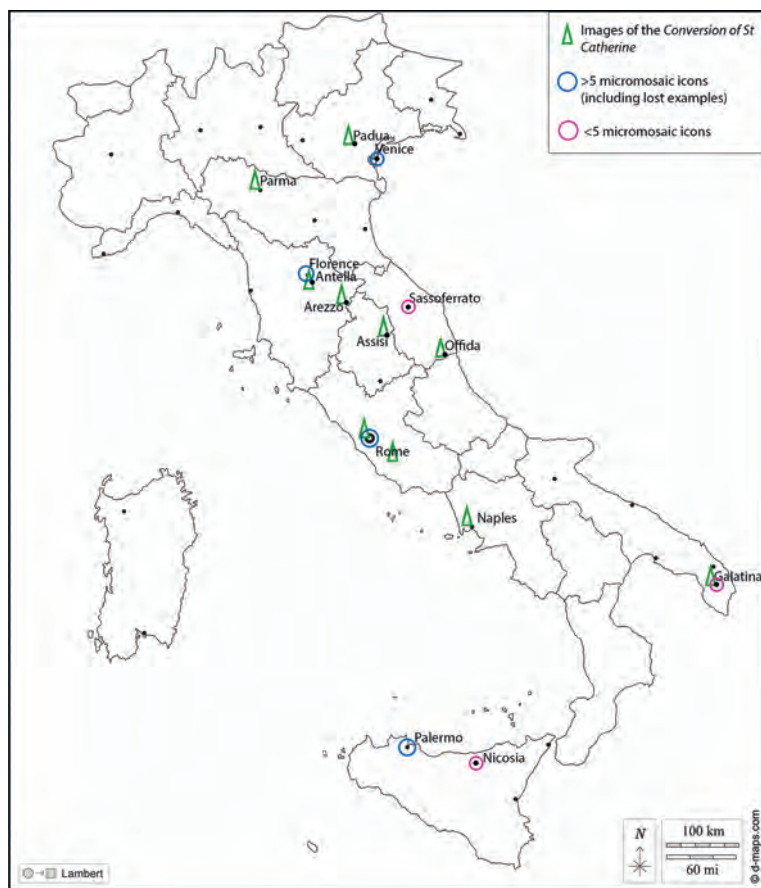


fig. 6 Triptych of Saint Gregory. Micromosaic icon of the *Man of Sorrows*, ca. 1290–1310. Without frame $7\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{8}$ in. (19 × 13 cm). Metal revetment frame with coats of arms, 1380s. Silver and enamel, $11 \times 9\frac{1}{8}$ in. (28 × 23 cm). Triptych, 1490s. Wood, metal, paper identification and silk wrappings for the relics, $38\frac{3}{8} \times 38\frac{1}{4}$ in. (98.7 × 97.1 cm) with open wings. Museo della Basilica, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, Rome

the icon was identified as the image commissioned by Pope Gregory the Great (ca. 540–604) after his vision of Christ as the Man of Sorrows during mass (an event called “The Mass of Saint Gregory”).²⁹ As in the case of the *Virgin Eleousa*, legendary connections to saints were invented for the Campitelli and the Santa Croce icons, transforming Palaiologan micromosaics into early Christian contact relics.

In other cases, micromosaics were not placed into reliquaries as relics but rather became reliquaries. Before donating his collection to Santa Chiara, Sassoferrato, Niccolò Perotti set his micromosaic of *Saint Demetrius* into a new frame, an Italian fifteenth-century piece that included an ampulla with manna from the saint’s shrine in Thessaloniki (fig. 7). The frame is decorated with the *tetrabasilion* (the imperial four-headed eagle) and inscriptions in Greek invoking Emperor Justinian, while the early fourteenth-century micromosaic may have been modified to include Perotti’s coat of arms in the saint’s shield.³⁰ By creating a “fake,” Perotti transformed the micromosaic into a “Byzantine” reliquary for the saint’s manna. Many other micromosaics also held relics in their frames. The frame of the Berlin *Crucifixion*, for example, has

ten round cavities; some relics survive and are labeled in Latin.³¹ As indicated in Bessarion’s will, we know that three of his micromosaics were framed by relics: icons of *Christ*, the *Entrance into Jerusalem*, and the *Archangel Michael*.³² The framing of works of art—Western and Eastern—with relics was commonplace in the Middle Ages, transforming them into objects that were simultaneously images and reliquaries, relics and portable altars. Together, this overview shows that the categories of contact relics, reliquaries, and icons often overlapped for micromosaics, providing us with a useful context to understand the transformation of the *Virgin Eleousa* into a contact relic of Saint Catherine.

At times, however, micromosaics were simply used as private devotional icons.³³ Although it is somewhat of a truism to say that many Byzantine icons and reliquaries were considered important devotional objects, deeply ingrained disciplinary boundaries make it easy to overlook the centrality of these works of art in quattrocento spirituality.³⁴ The Bargello *Christ* and another four micromosaics hung in Lorenzo de’ Medici’s bedchamber, indicating that they had an active religious function.³⁵ And although we do not know where Bessarion’s icons were kept, the three micromosaics with relics also signal a private devotional function, similar to the *Saint Demetrius* before it was donated to the Clarissan monastery in Sassoferrato. As Nino Zchomelidse and Beth Williamson have argued, relics in frames were used to render objects more potent, to authenticate the image, and to guide the viewer to consider questions of sanctity and the incorruptibility of saints’ bodies.³⁶ The *Virgin Eleousa* may have been a potent object for private devotion, especially if owned by a woman.³⁷ As we have seen, Catherine’s mystical marriage was intimately tied to the icon, and Victor Schmidt suggested that the conversion story may have developed out of the popularity of mystical marriages narratives.³⁸ Owning and praying to Catherine’s own icon may have been particularly powerful to women involved in the new types of mysticism that swept through Italy in the late medieval period.³⁹

At the same time, some of the most important collectors of the period were fascinated by Palaiologan micromosaics, acquiring them by the dozen. The Renaissance habit of collecting contemporary art and small Greek religious works of art is sharply criticized by Giovanni Battista Armenini in his *De’ veri precetti della pittura* (1587). Armenini describes villas covered in Titians, Correggios, and Giulio Romanos as “decorated with incredible art with the exception of the paintings of the Sacred images.”⁴⁰ These, he wrote, “were almost

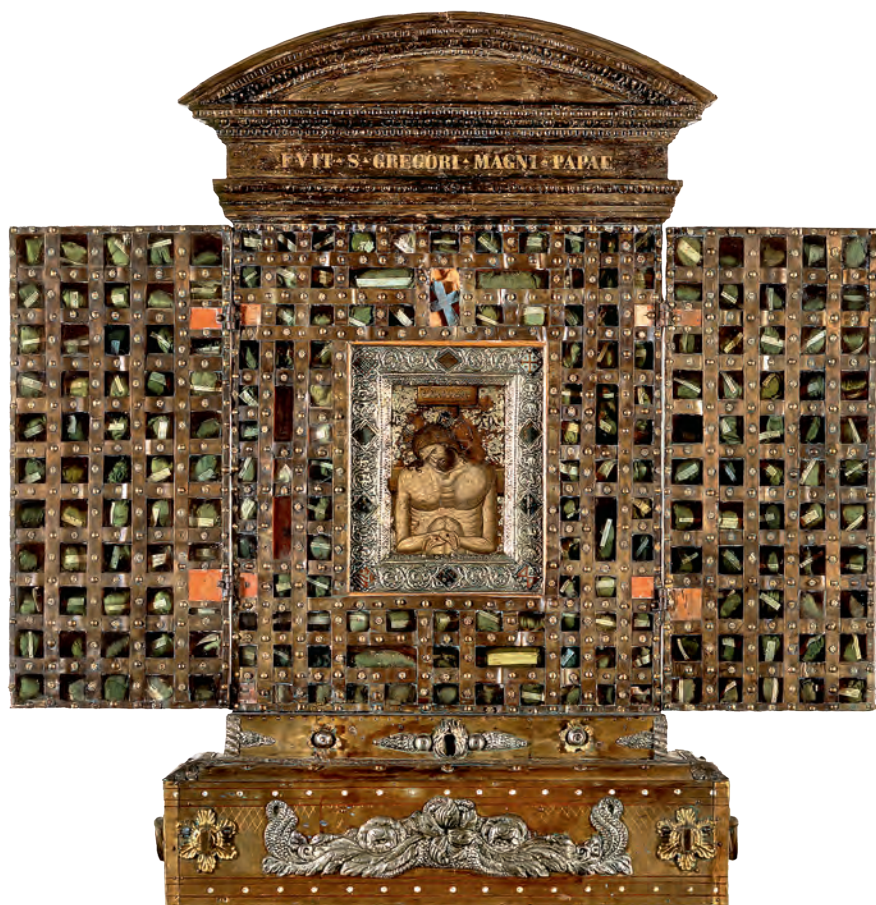




fig. 7 Portable Icon of Saint Demetrius, 1320–50, attributed to Constantinople or Thessaloniki. Miniature mosaic, with frame $9\frac{7}{16} \times 6\frac{1}{2}$ in. (24 × 16.5 cm). Museo Civico Archeologico, Sassoferrato

all small panels of certain figures, made in the Greek manner, very awkward, not pleasing, and blackened by smoke.”⁴¹ However, Byzantine icons and micromosaics were collected in such large numbers that they must have also been valued for their aesthetics and not just their devotional power.⁴² As we have seen, Lorenzo de’ Medici kept part of his collection in his *studiolo* and had acquired them for a cost similar to that for contemporary art.⁴³ We do not know how micromosaics were displayed, but by the mid-fifteenth century collectors mounted coins, medals, cameos, and gems, or held them in trays and tablets so that both sides could be admired more easily.⁴⁴ The small size of the *Virgin Eleousa*, the legibility of the label on the back, and the two indents at the bottom, made after the label was

attached, may indicate that the icon had a stand, similar to Lorenzo’s famous Tazza Farnese cameo. The presence of a stand does not preclude a treasury object, however, and the two indents could have been for a processional carrying shaft. The boundary between “devotional icon” and “art object” was porous, and micromosaics belonged to both categories, as best demonstrated by Lorenzo’s own micromosaic collection. The *Virgin Eleousa* was probably prized for its early Christian associations, for its aesthetic qualities, and for its materiality, which, as we shall see, reinforced its religious power.

There is no mention in the documentary evidence of the artistry and virtuosity of micromosaic icons, but it is impossible to overlook. Smaller and lighter than a modern smartphone, the *Virgin Eleousa* invites the viewer to hold it and look at it closely and intimately. Its surface may seem painterly, but it is made of minuscule tesserae, some .50 microns in width. Even from up close, it is almost impossible to ascertain whether details such as the Virgin’s mouth and eyes are made out of mosaic, and the artist has taken the time to give Mary fingernails (a single white tessera for each nail) and a thin white veil underneath her *maphorion*. They have played with the different textures and refractive qualities of the materials, which allow the Virgin and Child to become three-dimensional as light hits the gilded-silver *coupons*. The glimmering surface must have reinforced the icon’s perceived prestige and exoticism, for no Italian panel or fresco has a comparably complex surface texture, and none reflects light in the same way—not even Simone Martini’s beautiful sgraffito and punched surfaces. It is worth noting that other collectibles, including Isabella d’Este’s small gilded bronzes and cameos such as the Tazza Farnese, also changed, moved, and were activated by light and touch.⁴⁵ And, although more difficult to prove, objects in treasuries were also prized for their aesthetics, virtuosity, and what Bissera Pentcheva has termed *poikilia*, an object’s ability to glitter, move, and come alive.⁴⁶ As examples of artistic virtuosity, micromosaics fit well within eclectic collections—both secular and religious—that displayed a keen interest for *curiositàs* and included contemporary art, unicorn (narwhal) tusks, Chinese porcelain, reliquaries, and hardstone vessels.⁴⁷

Inventories, although not a particularly loquacious type of documentary evidence, can help us understand how and to what extent micromosaics were valued as works of art. They are generally described as icons, made in Greece or in the Greek style (*maniera greca*), of mosaic, sometimes characterized as made of the

smallest tesserae. They are often called “antiques.”⁴⁸ The terminology is problematic, and scholars have long debated the exact meaning of such terms, which seem to variously indicate date, origin, style, and even quality.⁴⁹ “Mosaic” is the most precise term, but it was not always used to describe micromosaics.⁵⁰ *Smaltato* (enameled) and *d’argento indorato* (of gilded silver) both appear in the written evidence, and sometimes the medium is not mentioned. Mosaic was understood as an ancient art form by the fifteenth century, but “antique” covered a disparate range of objects, from Palaiologan micromosaics to fragments of classical statues and even copies of those statues made by contemporary artists, such as Antico (Pier Jacopo Alari-Bonacolsi). Painted panels of the Virgin and Child were also sometimes described as *all’antica*, variously indicating the antiquity of the prototype, the date of the object, or the style of the image—or all three aspects simultaneously.⁵¹ The phrase *maniera greca* was used interchangeably for both pre-Giottesque and Byzantine works of art, and appears often in Cretan contracts for the bulk production of icons, which could be made in either the Latin or the Greek style.⁵² In the writings of the Dominican Fra Giordano (d. 1311) and of Fra Giovanni Dominici (d. 1419), the *maniera greca* provided images with authority. By the sixteenth century it was used disparagingly, to describe “awkward,” “coarse,” “disproportionate,” and “monstrous” works.⁵³ This contradictory and often puzzling terminology is best represented by the portrait of Giotto (1490) in Florence Cathedral, where the artist is depicted as a mosaicist of icons, while the inscription identifies him as the father of naturalism and the artist who rediscovered antiquity.⁵⁴

The words used in inventories for micromosaics suggest a combination of origin, date, and taste, elements that probably reinforced one another in emphasizing the antiquity, illustrious origins, and exotic style of a given object, thus enhancing its cultural, if not monetary, value. Scholars of Renaissance collections, such as Paula Findlen and Leah Clark, have shown that inventories capture only the financial value, but it was the cultural one that drove the Renaissance interest in collecting.⁵⁵ The terminology used in inventories is notarial rather than art historical, and the prices reflect the amount of gold or silver used in the revetment frames.⁵⁶ For example, in the inventory of Pietro Barbo (the future Pope Paul II), the most expensive micromosaic icon is specifically described as “not beautiful,” but with a decoration made of the “purest gold, and [with] four pieces on which there are sculptures that weigh ten and ¾ ounces.”⁵⁷ At the same time, the price of the

icons is comparable to that of contemporary paintings: the *Adoration of the Magi* was valued at eight ducats, slightly less than the icons with revetments, although it also had a silver frame.⁵⁸ Rembrandt Duits has argued that the Barbo inventory follows the display order of the thirty-seven icons, showing a fascination with their aesthetics: the two most expensive icons and the *Virgin and Child* images in the center, then the other micromosaics on each side, the painted panels, and finally the stone (steatite?) ones as bookends.⁵⁹

Florentine written evidence confirms that micromosaics were collected as works of art, and that they were used as part of a larger rhetoric of artistic patronage because of their virtuosity and alleged antiquity. In a particularly valuable and telling passage on the Tuscan milieu, Vespasiano da Bisticci wrote that people sent the famous humanist Niccolò Niccoli (ca. 1364–1437) “gifts, whether marble statues or vases made by the ancients, sculptures, marble epitaphs, autograph paintings by important masters, and many mosaic tablets.”⁶⁰ According to his postmortem inventory, Lorenzo de’ Medici collected micromosaic icons alongside antiques, to which he added natural curiosities and contemporary works of art.⁶¹ As we have seen, the micromosaics were hung both in his chamber, where they were the only religious works of art alongside Donatello’s *Ascension*, and in the *studiolo*, where they appeared among antiques, exotica, and other examples of artistic virtuosity. Coins, hardstone vessels, fragments of classical statues, cameos (including medieval ones), many Byzantine painted panels, and micromosaics were all considered antiques.⁶² The private collections of the late fifteenth century thus seem to demonstrate that while micromosaics were valued as devotional icons, relics, and reliquaries, they were also collected as works of art. Small and light, the *Virgin Eleousa* may well have been in a private collection, hung on a wall in a bedchamber or displayed in a *studiolo* alongside cameos and porcelain.

In addition to being valued as an ancient work of art, the *Virgin Eleousa* was likely considered a historical artifact. Micromosaics seem to have been considered genuine witnesses to history by both lay and religious owners, and often misdated by about a thousand years: the Campitelli and the Santa Croce micromosaics were considered to be fourth- or fifth-century objects; the lost (micro?) mosaic icon in Venice was attributed to Saint Luke. We do not know why Perotti commissioned an archaizing frame with the *tetrabasileion* and inscriptions invoking Emperor Justinian as the original patron for his *Saint Demetrius*, although it is possible he was

creating a “fake” to use as a conversation piece with fellow humanists. However, the fact that he later donated the object (icon, frame, and ampulla with the saint’s manna) to the monastery of Santa Chiara suggests that he may have commissioned a frame that he deemed appropriate for the icon’s age. This insistence on the antiquity of micromosaics should be understood as part of a broader interest in the material knowledge of the past, with Italians engaging with cameos, coins, statues, and ruins alongside classical literature. As Findlen has argued, Renaissance Italians “saw the past as an embodied presence.”⁶³ It is during this period that Italians started the first archaeological voyages in the Eastern Mediterranean, actively searching for what Melissa Meriam Bullard has termed “tangible remnants of a distant past”—a definition that is also easily applicable to relics such as the *Virgin Eleousa*, which bore witness to historical people and events.⁶⁴

Historical objects that blurred the line between artifacts, antiques, and relics could already be found in the Middle Ages, when Roland’s horn was held in the treasury of Saint Denis.⁶⁵ By the sixteenth century, there was a wealth of these “relics” in both secular and ecclesiastic collections: an autograph manuscript by Petrarch, drawings by Michelangelo, Lorenzo Monaco’s hands.⁶⁶ Though these objects could not perform miracles in the manner of saints’ relics, their value lay in their proximity to a revered historical figure. The status of previous owners often increased an object’s value, strengthening its ties to the past.⁶⁷ For example, the most expensive objects in Lorenzo de’ Medici’s collection, the Sigillo di Nerone and the Tazza Farnese cameos, were thought to have belonged respectively to Emperor Nero, and to Frederick II and a Persian prince of Samarkand.⁶⁸ Similarly, micromosaics were collected for their tangible connection to important figures such as Pope Gregory the Great, Emperor Justinian, the sainted theologian Gregory Nazianzus, and the martyred princess-scholar Catherine of Alexandria.

The understanding of religious relics as historical artifacts fits within the late medieval fascination with materiality and the growing interest in the discipline of history.⁶⁹ Modern philology, the study of language and its historicity, was founded in the Renaissance and famously led humanist Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457) to demonstrate that the Donation of Constantine was a forgery.⁷⁰ Shortly thereafter, Antonio degli Agli (1400–1477) started collecting lives of saints for his *De vitis et gestis sanctorum* and, in the process, realized that there was no evidence that Catherine had ever existed.⁷¹ He was not the only person to doubt the authenticity of the

Alexandrian virgin, although she remained astonishingly popular throughout the period.⁷² At the same time, the *Eleousa* itself was seen as proof of Catherine’s existence, as material remains and images were considered as authoritative as the written word.⁷³ For example, as early as the 1270s, Martino da Canale used archival evidence to corroborate his story of Venice, before stating that the images in San Marco confirmed his narrative.⁷⁴ Similarly, Lorenzo Valla pointed to the absence of coeval material, no “gold seals, marble inscriptions,” as indication that the Donation was a forgery.⁷⁵ We now turn to a consideration of what allowed for a fourteenth-century icon of the Virgin and Child to authenticate its own origin and status as a contact relic of Saint Catherine. To be sure, it benefited from the polyvalence outlined here, its location within a nexus of interrelated meanings—simultaneously a relic, an antique, a historical artifact, a collectible, and a virtuosic work of art. However, arguably, its effectiveness lies in its material and technique. The painstaking assemblage of minute pieces of glass into a luminous whole allowed the icon to bridge time and space.

ICON AS SOUVENIR

All relics require authentication. As Nino Zchomelidse, Holger Klein, and others have demonstrated, oral and written narratives were essential to substantiate the veracity of a relic, which then had to be corroborated by the relic itself.⁷⁶ In other words, for things to become relics, they needed both external and internal validation. While the former generally came in the form of provenance (often proven through contracts or sworn statements), the latter could encompass a broader variety of processes, depending on the object.⁷⁷ In a particularly stark example, when Florence acquired a finger of John the Baptist in 1394, the city asked Nicoletta Grioni for documentary proof of the provenance. A half century later, however, they doubted the relic’s authenticity, and decided to see if it fit with the Baptist’s right arm that was held in Siena Cathedral.⁷⁸ The two pieces fit together, effectively authenticating both.

In the case of the *Virgin Eleousa*, we can only posit the existence of some type of narrative that would have tied the object directly to one of the places connected to Catherine (Sinai, Alexandria, or Cyprus). The icon is dated to the early 1300s and attributed to Constantinople. With a few exceptions, micromosaics are generally considered a court product, a narrative corroborated by later Italian sources.⁷⁹ However, Liz James has recently challenged the centrality of Constantinople in mosaic production, demonstrating that it was a truly

pan-Mediterranean phenomenon.⁸⁰ Analyzing the dynamics of glass production and its economic underpinnings, James argued that workshops were itinerant and the work seasonal.⁸¹ In theory, micromosaic icons could have been made in any center active in the thirteenth century, including Constantinople, Venice, Florence, Rome, Thessaloniki, Damascus, Cairo, and Jerusalem.⁸² We do not know if mosaic icons were produced in the winter, during downtime, or whether they were made with waste material, for instance.⁸³

Wherever the *Virgin Eleousa* was produced, its label places it on the Italian peninsula by 1450–1500. Assuming it was not made in Italy, it may have arrived there as early as the end of the trecento, similar in that chronology to the *Christ Chalkites* in Galatina, the *Man of Sorrows* in Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, the *Twelve Feasts* diptych and the lost *John the Baptist* in Florence, and the five lost Sicilian icons.⁸⁴ Although the Latin Conquest of Constantinople in 1204 and the Council of Ferrara-Florence of 1439 often appear in the literature as the two pivotal moments for the importation of Byzantine objects, the majority were actually procured on diplomatic missions, pilgrimages, and the many ongoing mercantile contacts.⁸⁵ The *Man of Sorrows* and the *Christ Chalkites*, for example, were probably acquired during such travel.⁸⁶ Considering the popularity of Saint Catherine and of pilgrimages to Sinai in the trecento, the icon was probably commissioned during or after a pilgrimage, or obtained at a site associated with the saint.

There is a vast amount of scholarship dedicated to understanding how objects bridge time and space. In 2010, Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood published *Anachronic Renaissance*, which focused on how “out of time” objects (like the *Virgin Eleousa*) hesitate between temporalities. Their study explored not what artworks are, but what they *do*, qua art.⁸⁷ Nagel and Wood’s work is heavily dependent on a long line of scholars of medieval art, chiefly Richard Krautheimer, Hans Belting, and Gerhard Wolf.⁸⁸ In 2012, Wolf criticized Nagel and Wood for limiting images’ substitutional chain to a temporal realm, when medievalists have long argued that substitution works both spatially and temporally.⁸⁹ To rethink these dialogical systems of relations, Susan Stewart’s *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (1993) proves helpful. Although she is interested in mass-produced, modern souvenirs, she theorizes the relationship between the point of origin, the narrative, the object, and the role of memory and longing in the creation of meaning.⁹⁰ Discussing how souvenirs displace

the narrative’s “point of authenticity” and become its “point of origin,” Stewart identifies a common feature of souvenirs, relics, heirlooms, and any type of object removed from its original context that becomes proof of the story to which it is connected.⁹¹ She describes how souvenirs are othered and exoticized, and signal out-of-body experiences that cannot be replicated or explained, until they become the very evidence of the encounter. This shift (or what Stewart calls “substituting power”), when the souvenir does not need but becomes the narrative, has been discussed by many medievalists working on relics, the Holy Land, memory, and imagination.⁹² We can think of the *Virgin Eleousa* as both a relic and a souvenir, not because we know its mode of acquisition, but because of how the icon’s style, mosaic surface, and iconography authenticate a fantastical oral narrative that places the icon at the center of a major event, Catherine’s conversion.

Stewart’s work is also useful for considering the role of visual elements in processes of authentication. She posits that souvenirs are fundamentally incomplete and partial, and that they function as quotations, metonyms, and samples.⁹³ In its relationship to glittering gold wall mosaics, the micromosaic is perhaps best understood as a metonym or a quotation. As a quotation, the *Virgin Eleousa* is a smaller part of something larger, a portable, partial section of a wall mosaic that could be brought home. At the same time, the micromosaic is its own finished piece, delicately framed by black and white single tesserae (and originally a metal revetment).⁹⁴ A metonym is a figure of speech, in which the name of an object or concept is used to describe another, of which it is an attribute or with which it is associated. In this sense, the micromosaic icon is a substitute for wall mosaics. It is a bound, finished artwork that encapsulates, symbolizes, and references a larger whole. Whether it was viewed as a sample, quotation, or metonym (or all three), the micromosaic’s visual and technical similarities with the wall mosaics and icons of the Eastern Mediterranean—especially in Sinai—authenticated it, giving it meaning and value as a sample, a token of the East.

Understanding the *Virgin Eleousa* as a “portable monument” means contextualizing it not only within *studioli* and church treasuries, but also within the built environment of Italy and the Mediterranean. To better appreciate the relationship between the souvenir/relic and the whole, it is important to include both the reality of the Eastern Mediterranean in the fifteenth century and how Italians knew and imagined it, from re-creations of the Holy Land in art and architecture to travel literature.⁹⁵

fig. 8 Nave interior of the Church of Saint Catherine on Mt. Sinai, Egypt

Golden wall mosaics and icons abounded in images and structures that referenced, depicted, or re-created both the real and the Heavenly Jerusalem, copying the golden surfaces of Hagia Sophia, the Dome of the Rock, and the Church of Saint Catherine on Mt. Sinai (fig. 8). In his pilgrimage account (1394–95), Nicola de Martoni commented on Sinai’s marbles, lamps, icons, and mosaics.⁹⁶ And when Niccolò da Poggibonsi, a Tuscan monk and pilgrim, wrote the *Libro d’oltramare* (1346–50), he included in-depth descriptions and drawings of the Holy Land for the first time, bringing to life churches of marble and porphyry that were glittering with mosaics.⁹⁷ On Sinai, he paused at the doors of the *katholikon* of Saint Catherine’s to mention a mosaic (icon?) of the Virgin and Child, with Moses and Saint Catherine.⁹⁸ For late medieval Italians, the East was characterized by golden wall mosaics and icons—of which the *Virgin Eleousa* was a sample, a quotation, and a metonym.



It is this very connection to its imagined “original” context, its fragmented existence, that we may argue facilitated the transformation of the icon into a relic. For Stewart’s souvenirs and for relics, the meaning and value do not necessarily come from the object itself, but from the location and experience to which the object is connected. Relics acquire their power from the narrative, which is not only anchored in, but also based on, their origin.⁹⁹ The importance of the narrative for the production of meaning for a relic can hardly be overstated, as shown by the many images and texts that were commissioned to document a relic’s *translatio*. Like Stewart’s souvenir, the relic is partial—signaling a whole that is often geographically distant. Relics are quotations and samples of whole bodies, and they are metonyms for the saint, who is fully present to the praying devotee. The fragmentation of the relic, and especially the fact that its power lies in fragmentation, is discussed by Findlen, too, who compares it to how humanists understood the ruins that entranced them and the fragments of classical statuary they collected.¹⁰⁰ The authentication of the *Virgin Eleousa*, simultaneously a relic and an antique, thus depended on this very fragmentation, on its relationship to the “whole,” intended as the aggregate of knowledge about the East.

As we have seen, things need both internal and external validation to become relics. We do not know if the *Virgin Eleousa* had a documented provenance, and its parchment label gives no indication of its *translatio* narrative. More extensive than a treasury label but without witness statements or documentation to prove provenance, the label may have confirmed an oral tradition, simply informing the viewer that the icon had belonged to Saint Catherine.¹⁰¹ Because of its size, extensive narrative, legibility, and the elegance of its writing, the label’s sole *comparanda* is the long narrative on the back of the Santa Maria della Salute micro-mosaic (fig. 9). This sixteenth- or seventeenth-century illustrated parchment authenticates it, providing a myth for its creation (a Master Theodosius of Constantinople made the diptych, of which only the Venetian Virgin survives, in 1115, and gave it to Manuel I Komnenos) and devotion (the icons were shown at Hagia Sophia on the Thursday of Holy Week and processed to the Chora Church [Kariye Camii]). It does not explain how the icon reached Venice, instead highlighting the importance of the icons’ mosaic surfaces, made over a twenty-year period with “great skill, by means of hand-painted mosaic tiles.”¹⁰² It suggests that the two icons were venerated as relics in Hagia Sophia at least in part because they were micromosaics.

fig. 9 Portable Icon of the Virgin Eleousa (reverse), 1500–1700. Parchment label, 8½ × 6¾ in. (21.6 × 17.1 cm). Seminario Patriarcale, Venice



While the Venetian label explicitly mentions the micromosaic medium, the parchment on the *Virgin Eleousa* does not. However, the icon's mosaic surface played an essential part in its authentication, constantly (re)producing its meaning and value. Although micromosaics were produced only during the Palaiologan period, the technique allowed for the icon to be dated to the fourth century and strengthened its attribution to Saint Catherine. In Renaissance Italy, mosaic was not understood as a typically Constantinopolitan, Byzantine product, but as characteristic of early Christianity and classical antiquity, found in Rome, Venice, Byzantium, and the Holy Land. In his *Treatises*,

Filarete (ca. 1400–1469) spoke of mosaic as a long-lost form, seldom used since Giotto and Pietro Cavallini's time, which he had the occasion to see in a small Greek icon in Venice. Although he believed micromosaics to be made of eggshells, he still connected the panel to wall mosaic as if the Venetian image were a synecdoche for Giotto's and Cavallini's works of art, themselves the last examples of an ancient art form.¹⁰³

This understanding of mosaic as characteristic of an interrelated spatial (the Holy Land) and temporal (classical antiquity and early Christianity) realm arose in part from the geographic distribution of wall mosaics. Rome and Venice were indisputably the two major

fig. 10 *Dispute with the Philosophers*, ca. 1415–23/25. Fresco. Santa Caterina, Galatina

Italian centers, but mosaics can also be found in Orvieto, Pisa, Ravenna, Palermo, Naples, Messina, and elsewhere.¹⁰⁴ The importance of San Marco cannot be overstated, although James thinks enough mosaics existed in Venetian monastic and parish churches for golden domes to have become a ubiquitous symbol of church spaces.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, for the fifteenth-century viewer of the *Virgin Eleousa*, Venice was the major port for pilgrimage to the Holy Land.¹⁰⁶ San Marco's glittering surfaces functioned as a preview of the Justinianic Church of Saint Catherine on Mt. Sinai, but also for the wall mosaics found at other Catherinian sites, such as Alexandria of Egypt and Cyprus. Mosaics were common in the East, where they decorated the exterior of mosques and the interiors of churches, and most famously adorned the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, also founded by Justinian.

In Rome, the connection with early Christianity was not only admired but also actively reproduced. In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, Filippo Rusuti, Jacopo Torriti, Giotto, and Pietro Cavallini had created many important mosaics, all in early Christian basilicas: Santa Maria Maggiore, Santa Maria in Trastevere, San Giovanni in Laterano, and San Pietro in Vaticano. Later, Melozzo da Forlì (1438–1494) would decorate the ceiling and walls of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme in mosaic.¹⁰⁷ Ravenna, an increasingly popular destination because of Dante's tomb, was covered in Justinianic mosaics. And in Florence, the Baptistery, which was considered a Roman temple, was adorned with a massive mosaic program attributed to Cimabue. According to James, mosaic had gone “bust” by the 1450s, but a notable

exception is Lorenzo de' Medici's patronage of the Saint Zenobius chapel in Santa Maria del Fiore. Only a single figure was completed, but Lorenzo envisioned a much larger program, aiming to decorate Filippo Brunelleschi's dome with mosaic and stucco.¹⁰⁸ In the same period, a few portable mosaic icons were also made in Florence.¹⁰⁹ The connection between mosaic, early Christianity, classical antiquity, and the Eastern Mediterranean was visible in the region and often reiterated through a number of major commissions, setting in stone the association between golden glass tesserae and the origins of Christianity.

An analysis of depictions of Saint Catherine shows the same combination of antiquity and the Eastern Mediterranean that underpinned mosaics' meaning, demonstrating why (micro)mosaic may have been particularly apt, even powerful, for an object that had allegedly belonged to the martyr saint. In cycles of the life of the saint, antiquity was often suggested through the inclusion of a classical statue as a pagan idol, as in Galatina, where the philosophers surround a statue of Hercules (fig. 10), or in Antella, where Spinello Aretino depicted the emperor ordering Catherine to pray to a statue of a male nude. In Padua, Altichiero painted a blindingly white classical statue in the center of the busy *Miracle of the Wheel*. The Eastern location of the narrative is often simply referenced by depicting the emperor with a turban and/or as an Eastern despot. Altichiero's frescoes in Padua are an exception (fig. 11), with many figures racialized, wearing turbans, caftans, and Tartar hats (amusingly, one of them holds a shield of the Holy Roman Empire). In the medieval period, Catherine had been represented as a Byzantine princess, as in Margherito d'Arezzo's dossal (1250–1300) now in the Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa (fig. 12). By the trecento, however, Catherine had become a universal figure, and signs of her otherness were rarely included in her representations.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, this combination of antiquity and Eastern origin probably served to strengthen the authentication of the micromosaic of the *Virgin Eleousa* to its viewers, emphasizing similar connotations as the mosaic medium itself.

Finally, the *Virgin Eleousa*'s opulence probably contributed to the attribution to Saint Catherine. As discussed earlier, micromosaic icons were highly prized, held in major secular collections and in important church treasuries. They had a similar value to contemporary art, were given as diplomatic gifts, and often had legendary pedigrees that placed them at the Byzantine court. Micromosaics are sometimes described as *icone*



fig. 11 Altichiero da Zevio (Veronese, act. ca. 1369–88). *The Martyrdom of Saint Catherine*, 1378–84. Oratorio di San Giorgio, Padua

fig. 12 Vita icon of Saint Catherine, 1240–60. Tempera and gold leaf on wood panel, 44 1/8 × 46 7/16 in. (112 × 118 cm). Museo Nazionale di San Matteo, Pisa

indorate in inventories: “golden icons.” The tesserae of the *Virgin Eleousa* are malachite, lazurite, and marble, and the silver *coupons* were individually gilded before being placed in the beeswax.¹¹¹ In other words, the icon is made of precious and semiprecious stones, silver, and gold. The splendor of the icon’s surface is only compounded by its weightlessness, making it feel particularly fragile—an experience only heightened by its silver revetment frame. The opulence of the *Virgin Eleousa*, coupled with its small size and the delicacy of its artistry and materiality, was probably considered appropriate for a princess like Saint Catherine, who was first depicted in the traditional Byzantine imperial *loros* and *prependoulia* and then in golden Tartar silks and jeweled crowns and tiaras.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown how an early fourteenth-century icon became a fourth-century contact relic by exploring the relationship between narrative, aesthetics, materiality, origin stories, imagination, and memory. Micromosaics fluctuated between categories: exotic and local, relics of the Eastern Mediterranean and of early Christianity. Collected as relics and reliquaries, devotional icons and works of art, historical artifacts and antiques, micromosaics were polyvalent objects in



Renaissance Italy. Their shimmering surfaces reinforced their aura of uniqueness and prestige, for mosaics and Byzantine icons became alive when hit by light, moving and shifting. Activated and animated, the *Virgin Eleousa* moves, the child reaches up, the mother hugs her son tighter, the gold shines and sparkles.

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NOTES

- 1 Evans 2004, 217–18, no. 128.
- 2 Object file for MMA 2008.352 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters. Upon acquisition, the icon was examined, treated, and documented by Peter Dandridge, conservator, Department of Objects Conservation. Initial research included visual, microscopic, analytic, radiographic, and spectral imaging. Subsequent treatment involved the proper orienting of previously misaligned sections of tesserae as well as the integration of losses where the original design was apparent.
- 3 Sue Sutton, handwritten letter, April 4, 2007, in object file for MMA 2008.352 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters.
- 4 Hahn 2020, 5, has a similar disclaimer.
- 5 Pedone 2012.
- 6 This article discusses objects only described as Greek and/or of very fine mosaics; the result almost certainly undercounts the number of icons. See Moretti 2013 on the interchangeability of the terminology for micromosaics and enamels.
- 7 All numbers are approximate; see Clark 2018 for the mobility of works of art. The *Annunciation* now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (7231-1860), may have belonged to the Medici; Ryder 2007, 289n569.
- 8 The *Saint Theodore Theron*, now in the Vatican, had probably belonged to Bessarion; it is included in the 1498 inventory of Saint Peter's; see Müntz and Frothingham 1883, 112. For Chimay, see Evans 2004, 223, no. 132.
- 9 A (micro?)mosaic icon is attested in the Cappella Palatina, Palermo, in 1309; see Andaloro 2006, 108n73. Four were donated to the Church of Santa Maria dell'Ammiraglio (Martorana) in Palermo in 1333; see Garofalo 1835, 152, and M. Johnson 2010. A *Saint John the Baptist* was given to Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence in 1394; see Cornelison 1998, appendix G, doc. 2; Archivio di Stato di Firenze, *Carte Strozziiane*, ser. IIa, LI.3, f. 7r. Gentile Bellini donated a mosaic panel of the Virgin to the Scuola Grande di San Marco in 1506; Rembrandt Duits (2013, 170) identifies it as a micromosaic.
- 10 Others include the *Christ Chalkites* in Santa Caterina, Galatina (Lecce); the *Saint John the Baptist* in San Marco, Venice; and the *Twelve Feasts* diptych in the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo, Florence. The *Crucifixion* (Staatliche Museen, Berlin, no. 6431) probably comes from a church treasury in Nicosia, Sicily; the Louvre *Transfiguration* (ML 145; OA 924) is attested in Palermo before 1797. Evans 2004, 215–33, nos. 126–39; Ryder 2007, 63–160.
- 11 Object file for MMA 2008.352 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters.
- 12 On relic labels, see Smith 2014.
- 13 Jacopo da Voragine 1995, 334–41.
- 14 Muir 2012, 18. The conversion is first mentioned in a rhymed French text (1251) from Verona.
- 15 Nicola de Martoni 2003, 112–13; Calvelli 2014; Bacci 2016.
- 16 J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 73.PB.69.
- 17 Schmidt 2001, 26–27; Kaftal 1965, 258. Master of the Orcagnesque Misericordia (Italian, Florence, act. second half of the 14th century). *The Vision of Saint Catherine of Alexandria*, second half of the fourteenth century. Tempera on wood, gold ground, 8¼ × 13½ in. (21 × 34.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Lehman Collection, 1975 (1975.1.62), represents the vision rather than the episode of the conversion specifically.
- 18 Or they may be rarely studied. For example, the list of relics (1487) from Santa Caterina in Galatina mentions a drawing that had allegedly belonged to Saint Francis. Transcribed in Cenci 1994.
- 19 On cult images, see Garnett and Rosser 2013. It is impossible to ascertain whether the *Virgin Eleousa* was considered miraculous.
- 20 Cornelison 1998; Maguire 2010.
- 21 Bolgia 2013, 122: “relics and icons are ontologically different.”
- 22 Alexander Nagel (2010, 214) does not differentiate between Saint Luke icons, the *Man of Sorrows* in Santa Croce, and the *Mandylion* (known as *sudarium*, *Vera Icon*, or *Veronica* in the West).
- 23 Wolf 1990.
- 24 Bacci 2015.
- 25 Sanudo 1980, 164.
- 26 Pedone 2012.
- 27 The standing female figure on the reverse of the *Man of Sorrows* was transformed into a Saint Catherine in Italy. Carlo Bertelli (1967) argued that it commemorated Prince of Taranto Raimondo del Balzo Orsini's (1350/55–1399) Sinaitic pilgrimage, but there is no evidence of it; see Harvey 2019, 53–56. Corinna Gallori (2016) suggested it memorializes its hypothetical original patron, Princess Thamar of Epirus, who took the name Catherine when she converted to Latin Christianity to marry Philip of Anjou (1276–1331), prince of Taranto.
- 28 Freiberg 2018.
- 29 Gallori 2016.
- 30 Evans 2004, 231–32, no. 139. Martin Dennert (2019) argues that the revetment is Byzantine.
- 31 Evans 2004, 220–21, no. 130.
- 32 Müntz 1879, 298.
- 33 See Voulgaropoulou 2019.
- 34 See Holmes 2013.
- 35 The iconography of a sixth (micromosaic?) icon is unclear; for the inventory, see Simone di Stagio dalle Pozze 2020; English translation in Stapleford 2013, with introduction.
- 36 Zchomelidse 2016; Williamson 2018.
- 37 The only documented female owner is Nicoletta Grioni, who donated the *Twelve Feasts* diptych and the *Saint John the Baptist* (lost) to the city of Florence.
- 38 Schmidt 2001, 21–22.
- 39 Bynum 1987 and Jantzen 1995 remain foundational.
- 40 “con mirabil'arte fornite di eccetto di pitture delle Sacre imagini.” Armenini 1587, 188.
- 41 “erano la maggior parte quadretti di certe figure, fatte alla Greca, goffissime, dispiacevoli e tutte affumicate.” Ibid.
- 42 For the limited impact of Byzantine on Italian art, see Nelson 2013.
- 43 Of the eighteen *tavolette* in the inventory, nine are described as being of *musaico*. Of these, one appears as *musaico fine* and another as *lavoro greco*. Considering that they are catalogued together, they may have all been micromosaics and/or Byzantine. Stapleford 2013.
- 44 Bullard 2006, 89.
- 45 G. Johnson 2012, 191.
- 46 Pentcheva 2016.
- 47 Mariaux 2006.
- 48 For Bessarion's testament, see Müntz 1879, 298.
- 49 The literature on the *maniera greca* is vast. Belting 1994 remains essential; see also Weitzmann 1984, Cutler 1994, and Corrie 1996. Nagel and Wood (2010) propose a different temporal framework to the problem.
- 50 See Nagel 2008, 147, for Filarete's and Vasari's misidentification of the material (eggshell).

- 51 Voulgaroupoulou 2019, 17.
- 52 Ibid., 15.
- 53 Ibid., 4–5, and 6–10, for the post-Tridentine admiration for Byzantine icons.
- 54 For different interpretations of this image, see Hamburger 1998, 321; Nagel 2008; Wolf 2012, 138; and Kim 2018.
- 55 Findlen 1998; Clark 2011.
- 56 Clark 2011, 220.
- 57 Ryder 2007, 290–93.
- 58 Duits 2011, 135. This comparison may be somewhat misleading if we have lost the section of the Barbo inventory on contemporary art, as Xavier Salomon (2003) argues.
- 59 Duits 2011, 134.
- 60 “. . . gli mandava o statue di marmo, o vasi fatti dagli antichi, sculture, epitafi di marmo, pitture di mano di singolari maestri, e di molte cose di musaico in tavolette.” Vespasiano da Bisticci 1859, 480.
- 61 Stapleford 2013.
- 62 For example, the *Noah's Ark* onyx cameo at the British Museum, London (1890,0901.15), has been dated to the classical, Swabian, and Renaissance periods.
- 63 Findlen 1998, 95.
- 64 Bullard 2006, 88.
- 65 Nagel 2010, 213.
- 66 See *ibid.*, 214; and, on Petrarchan fragments dispersed as talismans, see Findlen 1998, 107.
- 67 Clark 2011.
- 68 Bullard 2006, 97; Clark 2011, 190.
- 69 Holmes 2011; Bynum 2015.
- 70 Valla 2007.
- 71 Frazier 2003.
- 72 Ibid., 222–23.
- 73 See Nagel and Wood 2010, chap. 20 (“The Fabrication of Visual Evidence”), 241–50.
- 74 Gerevini 2019.
- 75 Valla 2007, 57.
- 76 Zchomelidse 2016; Klein 2017.
- 77 There are many examples of how relics’ provenance authenticated them, and how this was communicated to the public through their modes of display. Of particular note are Gerevini 2019 on Siena’s relics and Klein 2017 for the two True Cross relics in Venice.
- 78 Cornelison 1998, 174.
- 79 See Cutler 2000. Edmund Ryder (2007, 197–222) identifies Ioannis Kanabes, member of the Constantinopolitan elite, as the patron of the *Twelve Feasts* diptych.
- 80 James 2017.
- 81 See *ibid.*, 31 (on Venice, where workshops closed from August to January), and 68 (on Orvieto, closed December and January).
- 82 It remains open to debate whether mosaicists made micromosaics.
- 83 Micromosaics use gilded silver *coupons* and not glass tesserae, which could not be made of the required size; James 2017, 35–37.
- 84 Anthony Cutler (2000) provides an overview of the movement of Byzantine objects into Italy, although he overlooks South Italy.
- 85 Salomon (2003) analyzes the original copy of the Barbo inventory, and convincingly argues that the Byzantine objects were all added by Hand B (Barbo himself?) after 1439.
- 86 Gallori 2016; Harvey 2019, 54–56.
- 87 Nagel and Wood 2010, 14.
- 88 Krautheimer 1942; Belting 1994.
- 89 Wolf 2012. David Perry (2014) built on this, using vectors to theorize how material culture created Venetian identity.
- 90 Stewart 1993.
- 91 Ibid., 136.
- 92 Ibid., 135. See Moore 2017 on how the Holy Land was imagined and constructed through travel literature, and Hahn and Klein 2015 and Robinson, De Beer, and Harnden 2014 on relics and reliquaries.
- 93 Stewart 1993, 19, 136.
- 94 There are matching holes for small nails around the icon’s wooden frame.
- 95 Moore 2017.
- 96 Nicola de Martoni 2003, 65.
- 97 Moore 2009.
- 98 “Above this said door there is mosaic work, a Virgin Mary with her son in her arms; on one side that precious saint, Catherine, and on the other Moses.” See Niccolò da Poggibonsi 1881, chap. CCXI, 132: “Sopra la detta porta si è lavorato, d’opera musaica, santa Maria col suo Figliuolo in braccio: dall’una parte sta quella preziosa santa Caterina, e dall’altra Moisè.” Anastasia Drandaki (2006, 501) argues that these were mosaic icons.
- 99 Klein 2017.
- 100 Findlen 1998, 109.
- 101 Collectors, such as Lorenzo de’ Medici and Isabella d’Este, inscribed their names permanently on objects.
- 102 “Nobilis quem dicunt Joannes ipsius imperatoris baronis duas nimis magnitudinis figuras, hanc dominae Virginis Mariae, alteram Christi resurgentis per eum miro ingenio ope musaici pincti manu constructas.” Ryder 2007, 91–95, at 93, no. 191.
- 103 Filarete 1972, 671–72. See Nagel 2008, 147, no. 16, for the misidentification of the material.
- 104 For a thorough catalogue, see James 2017.
- 105 Ibid., 445.
- 106 Chareyron 2005.
- 107 Notable exceptions are Baldassare Peruzzi’s mosaics in the Chigi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome.
- 108 Vasari 1996, 432.
- 109 Ryder 2007, 233.
- 110 Stollhans 2014.
- 111 Object file for MMA 2008.352 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters.

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Talismanic Imagery in an Ethiopian Christian Manuscript Illuminated by the Night-Heron Master

KRISTEN WINDMULLER-LUNA

For the Christian faithful of Ethiopia, prayers offer the best protection against the challenges of life. But in a world threatened by demons, beasts, and everyday misfortune, sometimes words of prayer need amplification. A manuscript of the *ʾÄrganonä Maryam* (*The Organ of Mary*, አርጋኖን፡ማርያም) (fig. 1) now at The Metropolitan Museum of Art is a rare example of an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian prayer book that combines religious words with talismanic imagery.¹ The text is written in Gəʿəz (ግዕዝ), an Afro-Asiatic Semitic language used in the Horn of Africa since at least the fifth century B.C. Also known as Ethiopic, Gəʿəz remains the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tāwəḥədo Christian Church. Different layers of religious protection intermingle in this book, blending the powers of word and image.

fig. 1 Attributed to Baselyos (scribe) and the Night-Heron Master (illuminator). Image (ሥዕል, *śəʾəl*) of *abba* Giyorgis [of Sägla] (አባጊዮርጊስ), fol. 1v in the *ʾĀrganonā Maryam* (*The Organ of Mary*), late 17th century. Ethiopia, Lasta region. Parchment, pigment ink, wood, leather, fiber, 6½ × 6⅞ in. (16.5 × 15.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Louis V. Bell Fund, 2006 (2006.99)



These include the prayers themselves, artfully written script spelling out rich, moving prayers to the Virgin Mary, as well as talismanic images (ጠልሰግጦ, *tälsäm*), whose unity of design and motif are incorporated throughout the manuscript in association with narrative images (ሥዕል, *śəʾəl*) in a way rarely seen in Ethiopian Christian manuscripts. By considering how these potent words and images blend, we gain a better understanding of the complex relationship between “magical” knowledge and Ethiopian Christian belief, and of the role of art as both an aesthetic and spiritual tool.

THE ʾĀRGANONĀ MARYAM

The *ʾĀrganonā Maryam* is a fifteenth-century text dedicated to the Virgin Mary, one of the central figures in Ethiopian Orthodoxy since the adoption of the faith in the region about A.D. 330. *Abba* Giyorgis of Sägla, a major fifteenth-century author of religious texts in *Gəʿəz*, is traditionally credited with writing this hymn of praise. Composed when the cult of the Virgin Mary was being vigorously promoted by both the Ethiopian Church and rulers such as Emperor Zärʾä Yaʿəqob (r. 1434–68), the book is an effusive adoration of the mother of Christ. Written in *abba* Giyorgis’s signature



fig. 2 Colophon with the name of the scribe Basalyos (ገሰልዮስ) and the “visual signature” of the illuminator the Night-Heron Master. From fol. 123 of the *Ārganonā Maryam* (fig. 1)

fig. 3 The Night-Heron Master. Banded border (ሐረግ, *ḥārāg*) with birds. From the “Life and Deeds of Monasticism” (ሐረግዊ : መንፈሳዊ ሂሳብ *Mānfāsawī*). Church of Maryam Dibo, Ethiopia (fol. 1r)



style, the text lauds the Virgin in elegant language rich with metaphor and simile, as well as references to the natural world and to Scripture, praising the Virgin while guiding the reader as they atone for their sins and seek her prayers. The introductory prayer, for example, lauds her grace and virginity, comparing her to a “ship of gold” and to a “pillar of pearl.”² A scribe copied the luxury manuscript now at The Met—a handwritten copy of Giyorgis’s original text—in the late seventeenth century in Lasta, a historical district of northern Ethiopia best known for its distinctive red volcanic mountains, where architects and builders carved some of the most famous churches in the world, the rock-hewn churches of Lalibāla. While the exact site of this manuscript’s manufacture is not known, its precise, even handwriting suggests the scribe first trained in a royal scriptorium in Gondār, some one hundred miles to the west, before working in a Lasta monastery. A colophon on the recto of folio 123 identifies the scribe of this book as a man called Basalyos (ገሰልዮስ) (fig. 2). Below the colophon is an ochre and black drawing of a sharp-beaked bird, previously identified as a ground hornbill.

Some believe this avian is the visual signature of an artist eponymously dubbed the Ground Hornbill Master, to whom scholars have credited ten works with a distinctive style of bold, linear, geometric graphic ornamentation.³ However, the ornithological identity that informs this artist’s alias requires a reassessment based on the formal evidence. Following Bent Juel-Jensen’s assertion that “these are almost certainly Abyssinian ground hornbills,” the red-throated bird has been linked to a (male) Abyssinian hornbill (*Buceros abyssinicus*), an avian with all-black legs, blue circling its eyes, and a red skin flap at the throat.⁴ However, a closer analysis of the plumage and legs suggests it is in fact another bird, the White-Backed Night-Heron (*Nycticorax leuconotus*/*Gorsachius leuconotus*). Like that in the illuminations, that bird has a smooth-crested head, a pointed beak, a white crest circling the large eye, a red-brown throat, yellow legs and feet, and white or buff feathers on its dark back and underbelly.⁵ In another manuscript at the Church of Maryam Dibo, attributable to the same illuminator (fig. 3), the bird’s plumage is depicted with greater detail. While the ground hornbill has a prominent casque (a hornlike bump or ridge) on its upper beak, these birds have none. Indeed, we may speak more accurately of the Night-Heron Master than of the Ground Hornbill Master; as such, this article will use that moniker.

It is tempting to link the Night-Heron Master with the scribal name Basalyos written in this volume’s

fig. 4 Left: Talismanic illumination (ጠልሰም, *ṭälsām*): Seal of Solomon, fol. 123v. Right: Banded border (ሐረግ *ḥāräg*) with notation for Saturday, fol. 124r. From the *ʾĀrganonä Maryam* (fig. 1)



colophon. However, this supposition is unlikely for several reasons. First, multiple people often worked on the same manuscript; its scribe (calligrapher) and illustrator (painter) were almost always two distinct individuals.⁶ The possibility that Basalyos (scribe of the presently considered manuscript) and the Night-Heron Master (illuminator of the manuscript) are two different people becomes even more likely when the volume is compared to other manuscripts whose illuminations scholars ascribe to the avian-monikered artist. Those volumes present different scribal hands and names.⁷ Given the evidence, this article will refer to the Night-Heron Master (formerly the Ground Hornbill Master) as the painter of the manuscript and to Basalyos as its scribe.

While the original text of the *ʾĀrganonä Maryam* was probably a continuous passage, subsequent manuscripts—including this one—divided the text's prayers according to the days of the week for liturgical reasons. In this book, selected folios have elaborate upper borders, themselves topped by small boxes containing the names of the days of the week, allowing the owner to locate the appropriate daily prayer. Called *ḥāräg* (ሐረግ)—literally “tendrils”—in reference to their vinelike interlacing motifs, these banded borders both highlight and separate key parts of the text. The *ʾĀrganonä Maryam* now at The Met contains five full-page *ḥāräg* (fig. 4, right), and a smaller half-page frame that encloses the

column of text intended for Friday. Painted with the same colors used in the primary illumination, the *ḥāräg* incorporate three major motifs in a variety of arrangements: interlace bands; gyronny squares filled with radiating triangles; and nested triangles. The repetition of motifs ensures that each *ḥāräg* within the manuscript is unique, yet visually harmonious throughout the work. The manuscript's artfully written letters—bold vertical strokes of black and red, with stylishly rendered angles and even heights—suggests that Basalyos was trained in *Gwelḥ*, the official script developed at the court of Gondär in the mid-seventeenth century for use in official documents and presentation manuscripts. Its use in the *ʾĀrganonä Maryam* implies the importance of the text's commissioner. While the manuscript's handwriting is clearly that of the Gondärine court scriptoria, its illuminations and *ḥāräg* diverge from Gondärine pictorial norms. Gondärine-style artists innovated a vividly colored, graphically bold—yet naturalistically shaded and observed—form that essentially dominated Ethiopian Christian art for a century and a half from roughly 1600 onward (fig. 5). The limited palette, sharp geometry, and flat color planes of this *ʾĀrganonä Maryam* thus contrast with the illuminations typically accompanying the courtly *Gwelḥ* script. These characteristics further support the argument that the work had two makers: a court-trained scribe who wrote the text,



fig. 5 Second Gondārine-style artist, Ethiopia. Double diptych pendant icon, early 18th century. Wood, tempera pigment, string, open, mounted $3\frac{3}{4} \times 6 \times 5\frac{1}{2}$ in. ($9.5 \times 15.2 \times 14$ cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1997 (1997.81.1)

and an artist who created the full-page illuminations and the borders. Moreover, artists almost never signed their work at the time of this manuscript's creation and were rarely acknowledged in colophons, making it unlikely that the man Baselyos also made the illuminations.

THE POWER OF THE BOOK

The very nature of this manuscript—simultaneously a vessel for the written word and a symbolically potent object in its own right—echoes the relationship between sacred word and image found within its pages. As in Roman Catholicism, the Virgin Mary holds a special place in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity; she mediates between Christ and the people, interceding on their behalf. Spoken aloud, or read silently, prayers to Mary were believed to be especially effective. In vivid language, the *ʾĀrganonā Maryam* describes some of the blessings bestowed upon a reader simply for reading or enunciating its prayers: “let each one of him who having read/recited this book let his mouth become delighted by the salt of divinity, [and] the sweetness from the honeycomb and the wines of sugar.”⁸ The act of holding this particular volume would also have delighted the senses: perfectly sized to fit in the palms of the hand, its small pages were cut from buttery smooth parchment. The intimate size and fine quality suggest that the *ʾĀrganonā Maryam* under discussion was an elite person's devotional book. But even if the prayers were not read or studied by the manuscript's owner, they still offered protection just by having been written on the parchment. The act of writing, no matter what the support, held spiritual significance. The book of the *Organ of*

Mary in and of itself is considered to be a kind of amulet, or talisman, which offered its owner supernatural safekeeping. Even when closed, the book held power. Furthermore, the scribe decorated its leather-wrapped wooden cover with blind tooling, stamping designs into the leather with heated metal tools (fig. 6). The decorative motifs are not purely abstract, but often carry names that evoke both their own forms or the names of religious symbols. The bars of the central cross and the outermost border are filled with the hatched “crisscross” design (*Cōh rəʿəs*) punctuated at the ends and corners by nested circles called “dove's eye” (*ʾəḥ:ḥḥ ʿaynā rəgb*) (fig. 7).⁹ The border surrounding the central cross is filled with an X-form motif also known as “cross” (*ʾəḥḥ mäsqāl*), amplifying the symbolic energy of the central image through repetition. Symbolic in their own right, they are arranged in a series of nested borders that evokes the designs on the *tabot*, the altar stone that consecrates each Ethiopian Orthodox church. Epitomizing the blend of religious and esoteric beliefs that characterize Ethiopian Orthodoxy, the cross is a Christian symbol—the device of the Crucifixion—but also has shielding and healing capabilities, adding yet another tier of protection to the volume. A book of prayers enclosed by a cover imbued with protective religious symbols was not unusual in Ethiopia; in fact, it was, and remains, the standard for Christian texts. What is remarkable about this particular manuscript is its use of *ṭälsām*.

ṬÄLSÄM: FAITH IN FORM

Ethiopian Orthodoxy is characterized by an entangled blend of Christian and “magical” (or noncanonical) beliefs.¹⁰ In the Ethiopian context, and indeed throughout much of the African continent, “magic” is a kind of religious belief in the ability to affect the course of events by appealing to supernatural powers. It is about using secret knowledge of the divine and the spiritual domain to better one's everyday life. In practice and theory, “magic” is linked to religion. Formally, the Church condemns “magic,” though in practice its stances are ambivalent or even contradictory; equally, what can be sacred or miraculous from a religious perspective (a cross) can also be “magical” from a different vantage point (the same cross used to heal or expel demons).¹¹

In addition to the books common to many forms of Christianity, like the Gospel or the Psalms (the latter of which themselves have apotropaic and therapeutic usages in Ethiopia), Ethiopian Orthodoxy uses a series of other texts described by scholars as “magical” or “magico-religious.”¹² Some theological texts see both liturgical and “magical” use, like the *Təmhərtā ḥəbuʾat*

fig. 6 Cover with blind tooling. From the *ʾĀrganonā Maryam* (fig. 1)

fig. 7 Diagram of blind tooling motifs from the *ʾĀrganonā Maryam* (fig. 1). Illustration by the author

(the Doctrine of Mysteries), which is often excerpted in healing scrolls. Not officially acknowledged by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, and sometimes condemned, these texts or extra-liturgical uses of theological writing are a widespread popular expression of religion that exists alongside and draws from Christian beliefs and texts. This secret knowledge, both aural/oral and textual, is based above all on the *ʾasmat* (አስማት): the sacred names of God, the saints, and other holy figures (like angels), names that give special weight to prayer.

The secret knowledge from these texts and names is then incorporated into *ṭälsām*. *Ṭälsām* describes the kind of image that appears in some genres of Ethiopian literature, such as healing scrolls or protective prayers.¹³ These images can also be the subject of their own manuscripts, as seen in an eighteenth-century *Mäshäfä Mädhānit* (“The Book of the Pharmacy,” መጽሐፈ መድኃኒት) now at The British Library, London (MS Orient 11390), or a nineteenth-century Amharic-language prayer collection, *Mäfətälä Šəray* (መፍትሔ ሥራዬ; British Library MS Orient 566). They also appear as “magical” additions or marginalia—whether textual or image-based—inserted by additional hands into otherwise canonical Christian texts. The inherent strength of the *ṭälsām* protects against demons, the evil eye, and disease, or heals those already marked by illness or possession. *Ṭälsām* depict the invisible world, including esoteric symbols like seals, grids, or designs representing the secret names of holy figures. Typically included in scrolls or codices, talismanic images are a particular kind of representation of “magical” belief.

Imbued with their own capacity to heal or shield against disease and misfortune, these images can be best understood as defensive tools. *Ṭälsām* did not illustrate a text literally, but instead amplified the potential of the written word through the image’s own inherent strength. Unusually for a Christian manuscript, this *ʾĀrganonā Maryam* contains two of the most common talismanic images, which in turn inform the manuscript’s sole figurative illumination, an image of *abba* Giyorgis of Säglä. In contrast to the talismanic depiction of the invisible world and its symbols, figurative or narrative images called *śəʿəl* depicted the visible world. This blending of talismanic imagery (*ṭälsām*) into a Christian illumination (*śəʿəl*) itself—rather than its appearance in the same volume as or as marginalia alongside strictly religious Christian imagery—appears to be a hallmark of the Night-Heron Master. It is a noteworthy and uncommon combining of “magical”/Christian and invisible/visible imagery in a single illumination within a seventeenth-century manuscript. Both stand-alone talismanic images in this volume reference Solomon, the wise Biblical king of Israel who was said to have “magical” powers, and who is believed to be the ancestor of Ethiopia’s Solomonic line of kings through his union with Queen Makeda, better known as the queen of Sheba.

The first *ṭälsām*, bound by a red-orange frame with a watery ocher background, floats on the upper third of the verso of folio 123 (fig. 4, left). Its borders are filled—and tested—by a cross whose solid geometry explodes with dynamic movement, from the outward-pointing triangles capping its crossbars to its tightly wound



ርዕስ ራዕሶ
 (“crisscross”)



መስቀል
 (“cross”)



ዓይነ፡ርግብ ፣aynä rəgb
 (“dove’s eye”)



fig. 8 Talismanic illumination (ጠልሰም, *ṭālsām*): Net of Solomon (መርበብተሰሎሞን, *Märbäbtä Sälomon*), fol. 134v. From the *ʿĀrganonā Maryam* (fig. 1)

fig. 9a, b Detail and overall image. Unidentified Ethiopian maker(s). Healing scroll (*ṭālsām* or *yā branna ketab*), 19th century. Parchment (vellum), pigment, W. 6 × L. 78 in. (15.2 × 198.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum Purchase, transferred from the Library (95.66)

framing curlicues. Smaller white crosses set on a diagonal fill the cross, reinforcing the image's symbolic strength via insistent visual repetition. This eight-pointed star or cross is the Seal of Solomon. The archangel Michael was said to have given Solomon a ring bearing the seal of God; Solomon then used the seal to summon demons and forced them to build a palace at the center of a labyrinth. The eight branches of the star represent the seal of God on Solomon's ring, while the curlicues are designated as leg-fetters for trapping demons or other malevolent spirits. At the same time as it evokes the story of Solomon and the demons, this seal can also be understood as a symbol of Christ's cross.

Crosses have been used in Ethiopia since at least the fourth century A.D., when they replaced crescent moons on the Aksumite Empire's coins. There are many forms of crosses in Ethiopia, from the personal (tattoos and necklaces) to the public (like the hand and processional crosses carried by monks and priests) to the liturgical (the aforementioned *tabot* altar stones and manuscript covers). The imagination of Ethiopian artists was inexhaustible when it came to designing crosses, frequently using the lost-wax casting technique to make a wide variety of unique examples. Playing with

positive and negative space, these bold works of art are symbolic of the Crucifixion, and furthermore, use complex geometric symbolism to allude to other elements of the Christian story. The cross in Ethiopian Orthodoxy was the symbolic representation of the body of Christ and the Crucifixion, and simultaneously an allusion to the Tree of Paradise, from which the cross was cut.

Linking the cross with the seal of God in the illumination emphasizes the Ethiopian concept of the cross as an instrument of the Passion as well as an emblem of the victory over Satan and death. Thus, its inclusion in this text was an affirmative, life-giving symbol. Sometime in this volume's centuries-old life, someone other than its original scribe filled the wide parchment margins surrounding this illumination with text written in the vernacular language Amharic. To the left of the talisman is a short text that describes the table below, which has months written across the top row, and a series of numbers filling the remaining squares. Together, text and table aid in measuring the hours of the day at different times of the year, almost like a sundial; one can speculate this was a useful tool for keeping track of the time of the morning liturgy, which varied according to the time of sunrise. Text and image combine literally here, each augmenting and informed by the other, though likely laid down on the page centuries apart.

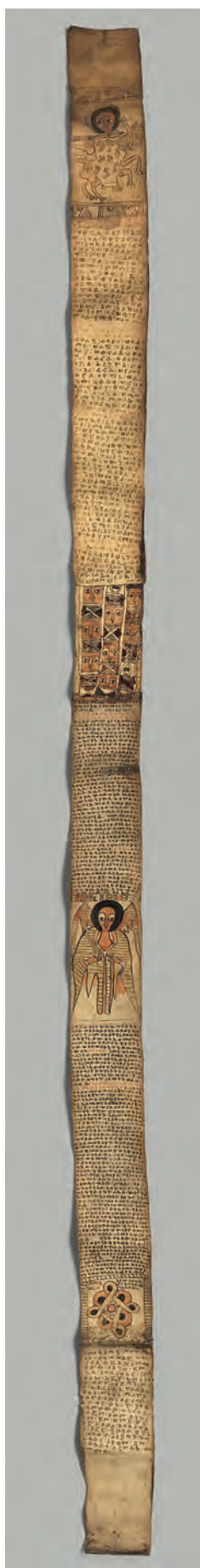
Roughly ten folios later, a grid forms an even larger talismanic image meant to deflect evil (fig. 8). Framed by bands of red interlaces, the grid incorporates the same squares that compose Solomon's Seal, divided into quarters by white diagonal crosses. Within the grid, they are further divided into eights, the slices of which pinwheel with alternating reds, ochers, whites, and blacks. The dizzying shapes trap the eye, spinning it across the page, only to stop it against the hard black bounds of the outer frame. Appropriately, given its ability to hold the viewer's attention, this rhythmic talisman is known as the Net of Solomon (መርበብተሰሎሞን, *Märbäbtä Sälomon*). Judaic and Christian traditions of Solomon portray him as wise, as well as the lord and master of demons. In one such demonstration of his sway over such creatures, he used a net to capture the demons of hell as easily as if they were fish in the ocean; the crisscrossing grid painted in the manuscript refers to this legendary rope netting. Still another interpretation of the grid binds its triangles and crosses to words. The painted net could thus also be a geometric representation of the secret names (*ʿasmat*) of Solomon, a kind of "magic square" represented in other works with an actual grid of these sacred words. The white diagonal rods that both divide the individual squares



and subdivide the illumination into smaller quadrants form a series of X-shapes. Together with prayers, these white X-motifs aid in the undoing of spells.

While Christian and “magical” practices mingled in everyday Ethiopian Orthodox life, it is unusual to find a Christian manuscript such as the *ʾĀrganonā Maryam* that incorporates talismanic imagery in this way. Talismanic imagery was more frequently associated with long texts of “magical” prayers, or what has come to be called healing scrolls or textual amulets (*tälsām* or *yä branna kətab*), a type of personalized protective manuscript. Cut to the height of their intended user, such parchment scrolls contained prayers for healing and safeguarding based on the repetition of the secret names of God, including requests for safe pregnancy or guarding against the evil eye. Juxtaposing the written word with the talismanic image, they were generally rolled up, stitched inside leather cylinders, and worn by their users, who were frequently illiterate; when worn, the potent blend of text and pictures shielded the wearer from harm, despite being hidden from view. Two healing scrolls in The Met’s collection contain talismanic imagery nearly identical to that seen in *The Organ of Mary*. A nineteenth-century scroll, one of the first African works to enter The Met’s collection, includes a Seal of Solomon at its very top (fig. 9a, b). A second nineteenth-century scroll incorporates a modified Net of Solomon, alternating the squares of the net with the faces of angels and singular eyeballs, whose wide-open stares repel the evil eye (fig. 10a, b). After the angels drew in evildoers, the net would trap them. These healing scrolls were created by *dābtāra*, clerics who, while affiliated with the Orthodox Church, are simultaneously sought-after and feared for their knowledge of religious and esoteric healing.¹⁴ In contrast, the Night-Heron Master (illuminator of The Met’s *ʾĀrganonā Maryam*) was a priest-artist, and would not typically have been trained in making talismanic imagery. Yet, this prayer book to the Virgin Mary is filled with talismanic imagery.

Though dedicated to Mary, one of Ethiopia’s most popular saints, this *ʾĀrganonā Maryam* does not include her image, unlike other religious manuscripts dedicated to her. Instead, it opens with an idealized portrait of *abba* Giyorgis of Sägla, the text’s author, entwined with talismanic geometry (see fig. 1). A frame of ocher, red, and black divided squares surrounds him, the same protective squares that compose the large Net of Solomon. The front of his triangular priestly robe is also covered in the squares, like spiritual body armor that shields him as he raises his hands in prayer. The upper part of his scapular, an apron-like religious garment worn atop



the black robe, is patterned with fields divided by a central cross into eight triangles, and then again by a cross set on the diagonal. Called a “gyronny,” this motif repeats both in the border of this illumination and throughout the work. Thin hatching brings lightness both to the robe and in the border, interrupting the otherwise matte planes of color. Posed in the *orans* position, a gesture of raised hands with upturned palms, the oversized hands and extended fingers with prominent nails (or finger pads) exaggerate his prayerful stance. Rather than the three-quarter pose favored by Ethiopian artists from the seventeenth century onward at Gondär, his frontal pose is archaizing, reflecting those typically used in fifteenth-century Ethiopian manuscripts (fig. 11). The talismanic imagery in this manuscript is not limited to these three examples: further along in the text, at the beginning of the prayers for Saturday, the *ḥaräg* is filled with talismanic squares, wrapping the text in apotropaic geometry (see fig. 4, right).

The Night-Heron Master incorporated freestanding talismanic images into at least one other manuscript, an *ʾÄrganonä Maryam* in the University of Oxford’s Bodleian Library (fig. 12), which also shares an identical *ḥaräg* with The Met’s prayer book. Talismanic images—nets and squares of Solomon—are built from the same visual vocabulary of squares, lines, and gyronny triangles used throughout the book to frame Marian prayers and dress a saintly author, visually linking the Christian narrative (*šəʿəl*) and “magical” (*ṭälsäm*) imagery. In a copy of the Four Gospels now at The British Library that bears the visual signature of the Night-Heron Master (Or. 516, fol. 100v), the clothing of Saints Mark and Luke, as well as the borders that surround them, is treated in the same way as that of *abba* Giyorgis of Säglä—built from shapes that create a talismanic whole. Along with the extensive use of talismanic imagery, these works are linked by the frontal depiction of figures with raised hands and geometrically patterned robes, which appears to be a kind of convention that the Night-Heron Master developed for depicting a variety of sacred figures. Each man has an oval-shaped head, with their hair, turban, and halo nested as concentric forms. Crescent-shaped black eyebrows frame their half-moon eyes, their sloping forms echoed below by long mustaches. Modifying little more than the pattern of their robes, or their placement within the composition, he employed this archetype to depict saints like Luke the Evangelist, Täklä Haymanot, and Gäbrä Mänfäs Qəddus. If not for the identifying caption written in *Gəʿəz* above his head, the figure depicted in The Met’s manuscript would be impossible to distinguish

fig. 10a, b Detail and overall image. Unidentified Ethiopian maker(s). Healing scroll (*ṭālsām* or *yā branna ketab*), 19th century. Parchment (vellum), pigment, W. 3½ × L. 75 in. (8.9 × 190.5 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Anonymous Gift, 2011 (2011.377)

fig. 11 Unidentified Ethiopian artist. Probably Däbrä Hayq Ḑstifanos Monastery, Ethiopia. Image (ሥዕል, *ṣəʾəl*) of Saint John from the ሐርባዕቲ፡ ወንጌል (The Four Gospels), late 14th–early 15th century. Parchment (vellum), wood (acacia), tempera, ink, H. 16½ × W. 11¼ × D. 4 in. (41.9 × 28.6 × 10.2 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1998 (1998.66)

fig. 12 The Night-Heron Master. Image (ሥዕል, *ṣəʾəl*) of *abba* Giyorgis; Gäbrä Mānfās Qəddus; and Tāklä Haymanot. ሻጽጎንጎን ማሪያም. Bodleian Library, University of Oxford (Ms. Aeth. e.28, fol. 1v)



from those other holy men, who are depicted without the attributes that would typically identify them, such as the quill, single leg, or lions and hair shirt, respectively.

How the Night-Heron Master became acquainted with talismanic imagery, which he likely did not encounter in his training as an elite artist, and why he chose to incorporate it into this and several other Christian manuscripts, remains unknown. Perhaps he did so because he was well aware of the supernatural properties of *ṭālsām*, and he added talismanic images to narrative images to enhance the protective power of the Marian prayers. He may even have received training as a *däbtära* at one point in his career, which would have familiarized him with making *ṭālsām*, though this too remains unknown, and perhaps unknowable. Talismanic images that evoked Solomon's powers reflected a Christian ambition to partake in, and even to possess, some of that "magical" ability. Indeed, this desire is mirrored in the blending of talismanic images and prayer texts outside Ethiopia, in Coptic, Syrian, Pharaonic Egyptian, and, to a certain degree, even in European manuscript traditions.

Through the Night-Heron Master's use of Christianized "magical" symbols—the talismanic image—and his unique pairing of them with narrative religious images, inherently effective prayers to the Virgin Mary were amplified, magnifying their sound and strengthening their impact in this unique Ethiopian work of art. Harnessing the strength of the invisible world in support of the visible, combining *ṭālsām* with *ṣəʾəl*, the artist created a bold signature visual style, the power of which reverberates centuries after the manuscript's creation.

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NOTE TO THE READER

Gəʿəz transliterations from the *fidäl* are by the author, following the transliteration system from Aaron Michael Butts, *Classical Ethiopic in Twenty Lessons* (2020). The *fidäl* is the script of the *Gəʿəz* language; each sign represents a consonant and vowel, with consonants varying in transliteration systems. When the original *fidäl* of a term is unavailable, transliteration conventions from the *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica* are used. Translations are by the author.

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NOTES

- 1 The title is also known as the *ʾĀrganonā Weddase* (አርጋኖን፡ውድሴ. *The Organ of Praise*) and the *ʾĀrganonā Dāngel* (አርጋኖን፡ድንግል *The Organ of the Virgin*).
- 2 Fol. 2v: እንተ፡ይእቲ፡ሐመረ፡ወርቅ . . . ወይእቲ፡ካዕበ፡ዓምጸ፡ባሕርይ (She is the ship of gold . . . And furthermore, she is a pillar of pearl).
- 3 Bent Juel-Jensen (1977) identified the artist solely as the Ground Hornbill Artist. Thérèse Bittar (in Mercier and Lepage 2012, 297–300) argues that the bird is the visual signature of the scribe named Basəlyos, whereas Stanislaw Chojnacki (1983, 491–94) argues for a “Lasta school” of artists whose distinctive style emerged in the Lasta province, around the city of Lalibāla, and in the Tagray region in the seventeenth century. As names of painters rarely appear in colophons, the appearance of such a bold visual signature is even more unusual.
- 4 Juel-Jensen 1977, 63.
- 5 While its present range does not include Lasta or Gondār (two locations linked to this manuscript), it was recorded twenty-five miles west of Lake Ṭana in 1927, suggesting a greater historical presence where the artist may have encountered the bird (Fuertes and Osgood 1936, pl. 12).
- 6 Historically, scribes and illuminators were male. While some women began to paint Christian subjects on wooden supports and on church walls in the late twentieth century and into the present century, they remain exceptions in a male-dominated field. Historical examples of female scribes or illuminators working on parchment have yet to be located, though some rare female artists such as Etsubdink Legesse now paint on parchment for both commercial and religious clients.
- 7 Importantly for the present argument the illuminator the Night-Heron Master and the scribe Basəlyos are not the same individual. Juel-Jensen (1977, 71) indicates that the manuscript (British Library Gospel MS Orient 516) illuminated by the artist he called the Ground Hornbill Artist was “written by MAHTSENTE MIKAEL,” as per an inscription on folio 20. The British Library confirms this scribe as Mahanta Mikael in its current records. Throughout his article, Juel-Jensen indicates that all “Ground Hornbill Artist”-illuminated works are written in a “17th-century hand,” and not *the same* scribal hand. While stylistically similar, the hand in two digitized volumes illuminated by the artist henceforth called the Night-Heron Master is not the same (MMA 2006.99 and British Library MS Orient 516, available at <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/733038> and http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Or_516, respectively). For more on work division in Ethiopian manuscript production, see Bosc-Tiessé 2014.
- 8 Fol. 3v: የሀልዮ፡ዘኢይማስን፡ወእኩ፡ዘይማስን፡ወእኩ፡ዘይማስን፡ወኮሉ፡ዘይነብቦ፡ለዝ፡መጽሐፍ፡ይኩን፡አፋሁ፡ቅህመ፡በዚወ፡መለኮት፡ጥዑመ፡እምፀቃውዓ፡መዓር፡ወእስራብ፡ሦከር (Let him sing in celebration of that which is not corruptible and not that which is corruptible, and let each one of him who having read/recited this book let his mouth become delighted by the salt of divinity, [and] the sweetness from the honeycomb and the wines of sugar).
- 9 Sergrew 1981, 25.
- 10 As no single Geʿez or Amharic word is equivalent to the English word or concept of “magic,” it is used in this article in quotation marks, and specific terms in those languages will be deployed when possible. Eyob Derillo (2019, 121) suggests that *ʾasmat*—as it “calls for the assistance of God”—is both the closest approximation to the English “magic,” and lawful to the teachings of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, while Gidena Mesfin Kebede (2017, 16–27) prefers the Amharic *abənnāt* (አብነት; “model, pattern, medicine”).
- 11 While the Church’s relationship with “magic” linked to healing or protection is one of tolerance, or at least ambivalence, it condemns other “magical” practices including *śəray* (“charms” or “aggressive/black magic,” and sorcery), and fortune-telling (oracles). Section 46 of the *Fəṭḥā nāgāśṭ* (ፍትሐ፡ነገሥት; “Law of the Kings”), includes penal provisions for such forbidden “magic” practices. It was in legal enforcement from the sixteenth-century reign of Emperor Zārʾä Yaʿeqob—a particular opponent of magical practices—until Emperor Ḥaylā Səllase I’s 1930 Penal Code, itself based on that text. See Strauss 2009, v, xlii.
- 12 A further note on the term “magic,” which, while used by some scholars of Ethiopia, has popular English-language connotations of Harry Potter, witches, and rabbits conjured out of hats, and often negative Western scholarly connotations drawn from the study of Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman cultural practices, or from binaries that opposed magic-science or magic-religion. In the context of Ethiopianist scholarship and belief, “magic” and “magic (Christian) literature” are terms that do not carry these implications. Rather—absent an equivalent indigenous Ethiopian use of the concept of “magic”—they summarize a variety of texts, rituals, and practices. As Getatchew Haile (2011, xxxiii) notes, given the invocation and beseeching of God by those who use such texts, “magic” may not be the most accurate descriptive term. For further discussions on “magic” in Ethiopian religion, see Strelcyn 1955; Balicka-Witakowska 1983; Kaplan 2004; Getatchew 2011; Wolk-Sore 2016; Eyob 2019; and Eyob 2020.
- 13 The term *tā/sām* can also be used to describe talismanic or amuletic objects, such as healing scrolls, but is used here to describe illuminations.
- 14 A *dābtāra* is a lay ecclesiastic in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church whose responsibilities include the creation of amulets and the talismanic imagery on them. Typically not members of the royal or monastic scriptoria (who worked for elite clientele and produced luxury religious arts), *dābtāras* are amateur artists who worked for common people. Monks or priests only rarely made healing scrolls because of this class-based artistic distinction. *Ṭānqʾay* (“magic specialists”) are also connected to “magic” literature because of their roles in amassing and refining it, often drawing from Biblical or other religious sources.

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Philippe Auguste Hennequin's *Portrait Drawing of Sir Sidney Smith in the Temple Prison*

KATHERINE GAZZARD

In an eighteenth-century drawing in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, a naval officer sits cross-legged at a desk and stares through the barred window of a prison cell, an open book in his hand (fig. 1). The drawing is pasted onto a blue mount and surrounded with inscriptions in English and French. Positioned immediately below the image, the French inscription comprises the artist's signature: "fait au temple par hennequin ce 28 brumaire an 5 de la R.f. une et indivisible" ["made in the Temple by Hennequin on 28 brumaire year 5 of the French Republic, one and indivisible"]. Expressed in the French Revolutionary calendar, the date here equates to November 18, 1796. The signature is written in the squat handwriting of the artist Philippe Auguste Hennequin, who was at the time a political prisoner in the Tower of

fig. 1 Philippe Auguste Hennequin (French, 1762–1833). *Portrait Drawing of Sir Sidney Smith in the Temple Prison*, 1796. Pen and brown ink over black chalk, 9% × 7% in. (24.5 × 19.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Stephen A. Geiger Gift, in honor of George R. Goldner, 2015 (2015.290)



fait au temple par le mariage de 26 semaines ans de la A. forme n. ind. visible.

With what a laden and retarding weight
Does expectation load the wing of time

The pen of fate dipped in its secret gall,
Perhaps on that ill-omened wall
Has written the tale of this tremendous sign.
Not that our weaker sight
Could read the mystic characters & spy
What to the unpurged mortal eye
Is hid in endless night.

his name! than George just begun
 The warble, whose rugged beak
 Is spread on thorns, more softly asks his food
 Than he that sinks amid the eggs, down
 Of those formative & pious beasts.
 To exempt his evanescent doubt his useless sight,
 He wish his prayer for living certainty

fig. 2 Maria Cosway (British, 1760–1838) after Philippe Auguste Hennequin. Sir William Sidney Smith, 1797. Etching on paper. National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG D6792)

the Temple in Paris. A follower of the egalitarian ideals espoused by the political journalist Gracchus Babeuf (François-Noël Babeuf), Hennequin had been arrested in September 1796 in connection with a radical plot to overthrow the moderate Directory government.

The portrait's subject is Captain Sir William Sidney Smith (known as Sir Sidney Smith), a British naval officer who had been captured at Le Havre in April 1796.¹ Although Smith and Hennequin were fellow inmates in the Temple, they hardly could have been further opposed in their national and ideological allegiances. Prior to his capture, Smith had been an intelligence

operative working for Britain in the nation's war against Revolutionary France. His role involved providing clandestine support to French royalist and counterrevolutionary groups, who stood at the opposite end of the political spectrum to Hennequin and his radical left-wing associates. A summary of Smith's imprisonment is written above the portrait in English: "Imprisoned in the Abbaye Paris on the 23d April 1796. / Transferred from thence to the Tower of the Temple on the 3d July 1796." A new line begins with the word "Released" but the sentence has not been completed, suggesting that Smith remained in prison when the text was written; space has been left for details of his release to be added in the future. It was perhaps Smith himself who wrote this note, since the looping script resembles his handwriting. Sixteen lines of what the captain's nephew termed "solemn poetry" have been added to the lower part of the mount in the same hand.²

These inscriptions appear to have been written with a view to the portrait's publication as a print, which remarkably occurred while Smith remained in prison. The publisher Antonio Poggi issued an etching based on the drawing in London on July 20, 1797 (fig. 2).³ Smith would not obtain his freedom until the following April, when he escaped with help from his French royalist supporters. The etching was executed by the British artist Maria Cosway. Since her print faithfully copies the inscriptions on the portrait's mount, she must have worked from the original drawing, though it is unclear how she obtained it. As part of his contract with the artist, Smith may have paid Hennequin, who was released in February 1797, to ensure the drawing was sent to Britain for publication.⁴ Alternatively, Smith may have entrusted the portrait to one of his spies in Paris. Whatever the case, Cosway was an obvious choice for a London-based artist to receive the drawing. Having spent considerable time in the city in the 1780s, she was well known in the Parisian art world.⁵ She may have accepted the portrait because of its connection to her old friend Jacques Louis David, in whose studio Hennequin had trained. While the drawing's route from the Temple to Cosway's studio remains uncertain, it definitely has a complex history, which straddles the English Channel.

Hennequin's drawing was one of numerous prison portraits created in France in the decade following the Revolution, a period of violent political upheaval during which thousands of individuals were imprisoned.⁶ This vast prison population included a number of artists, many of whom remained professionally active throughout their confinement.⁷ Several scholars have examined



the prison-made portraits of this period in the context of Revolutionary politics, finding within these works of art evidence of how individual French citizens refashioned their political, artistic, and personal identities in response to key shifts in the Republic's volatile ideological landscape.⁸ However, given its British sitter and its publication as a print in London, The Met drawing presents a more complex subject for analysis. This article highlights both French and British cultural contexts for the work. It will be argued that, even as a prisoner in a hostile country, Smith endeavored to cultivate his public profile in Britain. Hennequin facilitated and encouraged this attention-seeking project, recognizing that he could exploit the captain's self-interest to earn a profitable commission. Seen in this light, Hennequin's drawing offers a remarkable insight into the power of portraiture in the eighteenth century's nascent culture of celebrity—a power that resonated across political divides and on both sides of the Channel.

THE OFFICER AND THE REVOLUTIONARY

The son of an army officer, Smith entered the Royal Navy in June 1777 and rose through the ranks over the course of the American Revolutionary War (1775–83).⁹ After fighting as a volunteer in the Swedish navy during the Russo-Swedish War of 1788–90, he was named a knight of the Swedish Order of the Sword. This Scandinavian adventure proved controversial among Smith's erstwhile colleagues in the Royal Navy, since several British officers had fought and died on the Russian side of the conflict. Smith, however, seemed immune to his peers' consternation and delighted in wearing the insignia of his Swedish knighthood, exhibiting the flair for self-aggrandizement that colored his entire career. He rejoined the British navy in 1793 to fight in the war against Revolutionary France. In December 1793, he played a key role in the British retreat from Toulon, implementing a scorched-earth policy on the orders of Admiral Samuel Hood, 1st Baron Hood (later 1st Viscount Hood). Having overseen the burning of several French ships and Toulon's large arsenal, he returned to Britain a minor hero and was appointed captain of the frigate *Diamond*. While his official orders on this ship were to harass enemy merchants off France's northern coast, he was also charged with managing clandestine intelligence operations. This involved dispatching British agents into the French interior and supplying dissident royalists with money and weapons.¹⁰ One of his principal agents was his close friend John Wesley Wright, whose official role as Smith's secretary was a cover for his espionage activities.

Wright was with Smith when the captain was taken prisoner at Le Havre on April 17, 1796. Also present was Jacques-Jean-Marie François Boudin de Tromelin, a former royalist soldier who had joined the British intelligence network. The three men were captured while attempting to seize a French privateer from the mouth of the Seine.¹¹ Following their capture, Smith, Wright, and Tromelin—the latter masquerading as the captain's servant under the false name "John Bromley"—were transported to Paris, where they were incarcerated with civilian prisoners, first in the Abbaye, then in the Temple. The British government offered to release a French officer in exchange for Smith's freedom but the French authorities refused the deal, reneging on the system of prisoner exchange that was a convention of eighteenth-century warfare.¹² The French Directory publicly justified Smith's exceptional treatment on the grounds that he was guilty of incendiarism because of his actions at Toulon, although the truth was that, knowing of his involvement in espionage, it believed he was too valuable to let go.¹³ A fourteenth-century fortress, the Temple had held key members of the French royal family between 1792 and early 1796 and was a site of considerable public curiosity in both France and Britain.¹⁴ By detaining Smith in this infamous prison, the Directory signaled to its British counterparts that it knew they had captured a high-value prisoner.

However, Smith had powerful protectors within the French government, who shielded him from harsh punishment.¹⁵ He benefited from privileges not afforded to ordinary prisoners, including unrestricted correspondence and significant personal liberty.¹⁶ Furthermore, his allies on the outside kept him supplied with funds, allowing him to maintain a genteel standard of living.¹⁷ Although initially separated from his colleague Wright, this imposition was eased after a few months, from which point onward Smith, Wright, and their co-conspirator Tromelin (in his servant disguise) were able to associate freely with one another.¹⁸

It was not long after the trio's reunion that they encountered Hennequin, whose circumstances were vastly different.¹⁹ Known for his neoclassical history paintings, Hennequin had studied in his native Lyon under the Swedish artist Per Eberhard Cogell before joining David's studio in Paris in 1779. He worked for a number of years in Rome and then returned to France, where he became engaged in political activism. Like many of David's pupils, Hennequin supported the Jacobin cause. His arrest in September 1796 followed his involvement in a foiled plot to infiltrate the garrison

fig. 3 Philippe Auguste Hennequin. *Sir Sidney Smith Standing on the Right in Discussion with Midshipman and Secretary John Wesley Wright, François de Tromelin Seated at the Left in the Tower of the Temple Prison, Paris, 1796*. Pen and brown ink, gray wash, 10 3/4 × 17 3/4 in. (27.2 × 44.2 cm). British Museum, London (1963,1214.14)

at Grenelle with the aim of raising an armed insurrection against the Directory. This attempted uprising was conducted by followers of Gracchus Babeuf, a radical proponent of egalitarian ideals, including the abolition of private property. Along with other radicals, Babeuf's adherents had been subjected to relentless state persecution since the Directory's assumption of power in autumn 1795.²⁰ As a result of this persecution, the revolutionaries who staged the assault at Grenelle were impoverished and desperate, Hennequin included. He was arrested alongside more than one hundred others, thirty of whom—including two of the artist's closest friends—were executed on October 9, 1796. On the same day, Hennequin received an indefinite sentence.²¹ His lawyer launched an appeal on his behalf, which was eventually successful. However, at the time of his encounter with Smith, he remained poor and uncertain of his fate. That two prisoners so drastically opposed in their circumstances and ideology could come into contact in the same political prison is testament to the unique predicament of the Directory, which relied heavily on prisons to stabilize the Republic against left- and right-wing subversion.

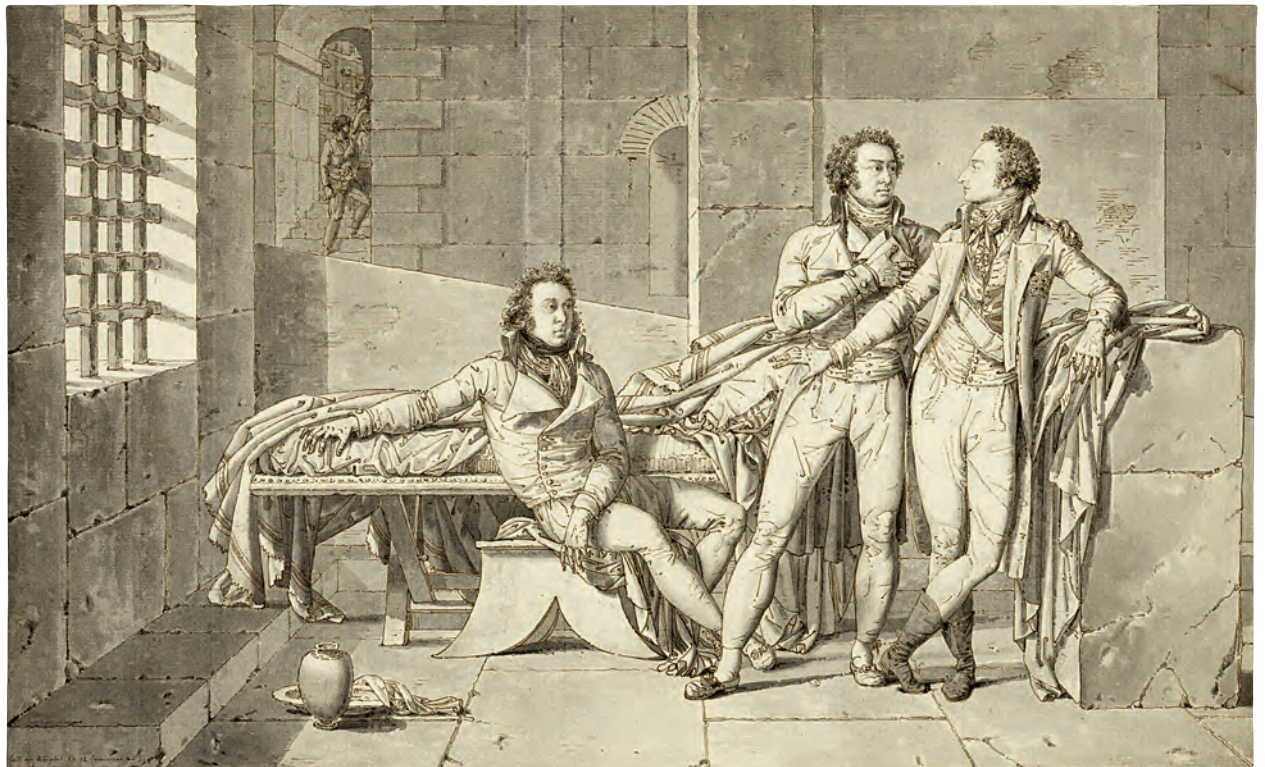
TWO DRAWINGS

Hennequin's dealings with Smith are described in the artist's memoirs, which his widow compiled

from his notes after his death in 1833.²² According to this account:

The facility I had to see M. le Commodore [Smith] gave me the idea to make some drawings to show him to try to arouse his desire to have one. Having succeeded in this, he did not hesitate to ask for a drawn portrait, as well as one of his secretary and even one of his servant who, like him, was English and had not left him since his arrest. I made a drawing of three figures, which I presented to him. He was satisfied and asked me the price. . . . I no longer had anything in the world and the smallest sum would have been of great help to me. I ended up begging the commodore to excuse me from putting a price on the sketch and to do what he saw fit. He presented me with four doubles louis which I received with gratitude, but I added to this first drawing another drawing which I offered him.²³

The above passage suggests that Smith received two drawings from Hennequin, the first being a group portrait of three figures for which the captain paid four doubles louis. This drawing is now in the British Museum, London, and depicts Smith with his friends Wright and Tromelin (fig. 3).²⁴ In an image that recalls the ease and glamour of an aristocratic portrait, the captain leans nonchalantly against a plinth while Wright wraps an



affectionate arm around his shoulders and Tromelin relaxes on a nearby bench. The portrait in *The Met* is generally assumed to be the second drawing mentioned in Hennequin's memoirs, which the artist claims to have presented to Smith after accepting payment for the group portrait. However, it should be noted that the drawing in *The Met* is actually signed with an earlier date (28 brumaire an 5 [November 18, 1796]) than the London one (12 frimaire an 5 [December 2, 1796]). This apparent discrepancy demonstrates that Hennequin's account should be read with a cautious and critical eye, written as it was decades after the fact.

The memoirs give the impression that Hennequin and Smith enjoyed a cordial relationship. The artist writes that he often had tea with the captain, whom he found to be an art lover, and that their meetings relieved the monotony of prison life.²⁵ However, taking into account the profound differences in their politics and circumstances at the time, we should perhaps treat this rose-tinted recollection of friendship with skepticism. It may be more productive to examine their relationship through the lens of business and to ask what both men stood to gain from each other. Reading between the lines of Hennequin's account, in which he mentions that "the smallest sum would have been of great help to me," it seems that the artist's motivation was in large part economic. In his impoverished state, four doubles louis—gold coins, which, unlike the paper currency introduced after the Revolution, could not lose their value—represented a small fortune, significantly increasing his family's chances of survival. We can imagine that, confronted with the captain's wealth and ego, Hennequin recognized Smith as a potential client who could be persuaded to pay handsomely for a portrait.

Smith was regarded in his own time as a highly conceited individual. The Duke of Wellington called him "a mere vaporiser," by which he meant that Smith talked incessantly about himself and never said anything of substance.²⁶ However, this theatrical self-promotion was not without self-awareness. Exploring Smith's intelligence work, Michael Durey argues that the captain could be discreet when required and that at other times he deployed his pomp and bluster deliberately to obfuscate the clandestine schemes of his fellow spies.²⁷ Underneath his narcissistic tendencies, Smith understood the value of a prominent public profile and the mechanisms through which one could be maintained and manipulated. His commissions from Hennequin should be viewed in light of his careful management of his own reputation.

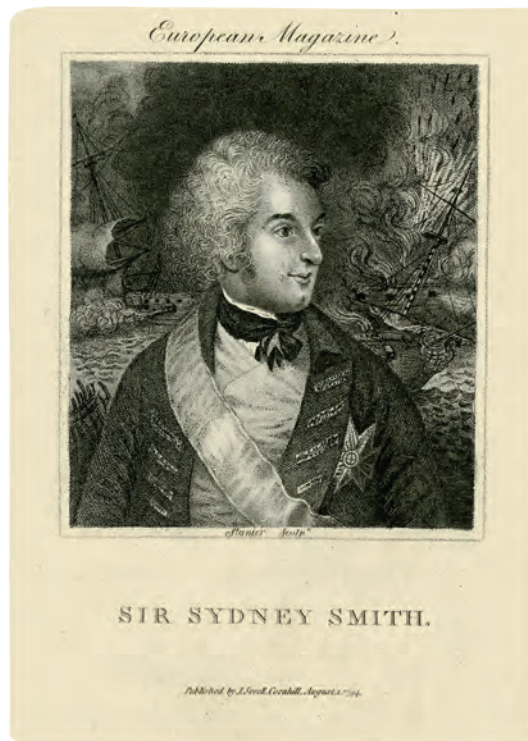
In this context, it is worth noting several important differences in the style and presentation of the two drawings that Hennequin produced for Smith. Layers of gray wash create subtle tonal modeling in the British Museum's group portrait, emphasizing the sculptural forms of the frieze-like composition and making the drawing appear like an exquisite grisaille painting. Like its counterpart in *The Met*, the portrait has been pasted onto a blue sheet. In this case, however, the mount acts primarily as a framing device, having been trimmed around the image and decorated with ruled lines. A brief inscription beneath the image highlights Smith's friendship with Wright: "Sir Sidney Smith Transferred from the Abbaye prison to the tower of the Temple, Paris and confined separately from his friend and fellow prisoner Mr Wright 3 July 1796." The work would have been somewhat mystifying to those outside Smith's immediate circle of friends and colleagues. Most viewers would have struggled to appreciate why Wright and Tromelin (or "Bromley")—ostensibly a secretary and a servant—were important, much less how they came to be on such relaxed and intimate terms with their commander. Given that both men were involved in espionage, the true nature of their work was necessarily secret. Seen from this perspective, it seems likely that the British Museum drawing was intended for private display before an exclusive audience of those with knowledge of Smith's covert activities.

The portrait in *The Met*, by contrast, presents Smith as a solitary figure, conforming to the widely understood cultural trope of the heroic officer. The drawing is rendered entirely in pen and ink, without any of the gray wash used in the group portrait. Light, shade, and texture are suggested with hatching, dots, and curlicues in a bravura exhibition of mark-making, which seems designed to show off Hennequin's superlative draftsmanship. Moreover, the linearity of this approach was ideally suited for translation into print, raising the tantalizing possibility that the artist and the sitter had the publication of the portrait in mind from the start. The idea of creating a portrait for the print market could have originated with either Hennequin, who clearly recognized the captain's penchant for self-promotion, or Smith, who was already well-versed in courting fame.

THE CULTURE OF CELEBRITY

An important context for the drawing in *The Met* and the resulting etching is the eighteenth century's burgeoning culture of celebrity, in which portrait prints played a central role. The history of celebrity

fig. 4 R. Stanier (British, act. 1770–91). *Sir Sydney Smith*, 1794. Stipple engraving on paper, $6\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{7}{16}$ in. (15.8 × 11.3 cm). British Museum, London (1865,0520.155)



has become a major area of research in recent years. Although the concept of fame has a much longer history, scholars generally agree that celebrity—defined as a wide-reaching, commodified type of fame that is produced through the mass-media circulation of an individual's image—first emerged in the long eighteenth century, when the growth of the press and the print market established an extensive apparatus for disseminating fame.²⁸ Studies of early celebrity have typically focused on stage performers, literary personalities, and others in the arts.²⁹ Cheryl Wanko suggests that this bias has arisen because “activities traditionally considered not very useful or important (such as singing or acting, in comparison to military prowess) generate the surprising divorce between meaningful achievement and the level of renown that helps characterise modern celebrity.”³⁰ However, as the psychologist David Giles argues, celebrity should be “seen as a *process*,” which can apply to anyone: it does not describe *what* an individual is known for but rather *how* he or she becomes known.³¹ Proceeding on this basis, an increasing number of scholars are now investigating the phenomenon of eighteenth-century celebrity in relation to various public figures, from military personnel and explorers to statesmen and radicals.³²

In eighteenth-century Britain, there was a particularly well-developed culture of naval celebrity, from which Smith profited. The prominence of naval officers within the British cultural imagination at this time was

linked to the nation's emergence as the world's dominant maritime power. Britain's manifold successes at sea during the eighteenth century were seized upon as grist to the mill of national mythmaking, constructing a powerful identity for Britain as a “maritime nation,” the prowess and virtues of which were embodied in its naval heroes.³³ At the same time, officers in the Royal Navy faced fierce internal competition for the best assignments. Promotions were awarded through a combination of merit and patronage, meaning that officers needed to exhibit their talent as frequently and publicly as possible in order to impress their superiors.³⁴ Distinguishing oneself in the course of one's naval duties could also have social benefits, enabling officers to gain access to the upper ranks of fashionable society. Cultivating a heroic public image was therefore important. Throughout the eighteenth century, a vast body of popular literature, including books, newspapers, pamphlets, and ballads, chronicled the exploits of the nation's leading military and naval commanders, granting these individuals the kind of public visibility associated with celebrity status. Alongside this textual coverage, portraits of naval officers circulated as prints, appeared as magazine illustrations, and annually adorned the walls of the Royal Academy's summer exhibition.

Smith's career exemplifies the processes through which a naval officer could become a public figure. He first tasted fame in January 1794 after he was singled out for praise in official reports from the evacuation of Toulon, where he had been instrumental in destroying French ships in the harbor.³⁵ Laudatory articles appeared in contemporary newspapers, including one report in the *Public Advertiser* declaring that Smith had “an intrepidity which could be equalled only by his coolness and presence of mind” and that he had done “more in one day towards the destruction of the French navy, than ever was done by any one of our most splendid victories.”³⁶ A few months later, Smith was the subject of a substantial profile in the *European Magazine*, which detailed his family background, education, and early career.³⁷ An engraved portrait by R. Stanier accompanied the profile (fig. 4).³⁸ It featured the destruction of Toulon in the background, and although the likeness was crude, Stanier nonetheless emphasized many of the features that would become central to Smith's public image, including the ribbon and star of his Swedish knighthood, his pointed nose, and his short curly hair. Praising Smith's “cool resolution and undaunted courage,” the profile concluded with the declaration that “we anticipate the honours he will acquire should the enemy afford him an opportunity.”³⁹

This statement underscores the extent to which naval officers conducted their careers in the public eye and the weight of expectation under which they labored. Given this context, it is easy to imagine that Smith might have felt frustration during his imprisonment in Paris, which deprived him of opportunities to acquire the honors that the press had anticipated for him.

However, Smith's capture in April 1796 did have the benefit of catapulting his name into the headlines once again. The British newspapers followed closely the developments of his imprisonment.⁴⁰ The *Evening Mail*, for example, announced on April 22, 1796: "we learn that Sir Sydney Smith has been sent to Paris. Every person must lament the loss of such an excellent Officer, who has, on every occasion, distinguished himself in the most brave manner."⁴¹ More printed portraits of the captain were issued about this time to capitalize on his resurgent celebrity. These included a mezzotint published on May 2, 1796, by the Norwich-based print-maker Edward Bell (fig. 5). Based on a painting by the artist John Westbrooke Chandler, Bell's mezzotint featured the burning of Toulon in the background, an allusion to Smith's famous earlier exploits reinforcing his reputation as a courageous man of action.

As P. David Marshall notes in his influential study of celebrity, the word is derived from the Latin terms *celebrem*, connoting both "famous" and "thronged," and *celere*, meaning "swift," as in the English word *celerity*.⁴² Thus, by definition, a celebrity image is one that

rapidly gains widespread exposure and popular recognition. By the same token, celebrity can be short-lived, fading from memory as quickly as it emerges. However, in Smith's case, political factors kept his plight in the public eye. His imprisonment received regular notice in parliamentary debates and political pamphlets, typically from pro-war Tories who exaggerated Smith's suffering in order to vindicate the continuation of the war effort: no peace could be made, they argued, with enemies who treated prisoners of war so barbarously. Edmund Burke, for instance, wrote an open letter in 1797 opposing the idea of a peace settlement with France, in which he declared that the bleakness of Smith's captivity "will best be understood, by knowing, that amongst its *mitigations*, was the permission to walk occasionally in the court [the courtyard of the prison], and to enjoy the privilege of shaving himself."⁴³ In fact, Smith enjoyed comfortable living conditions and extensive personal liberty within the Temple. However, while statements like Burke's were inaccurate and propagandistic, they nonetheless ensured that Smith's ordeal remained current in British public discourse. From his knowledge of British politics and his correspondence with his friends on the outside, Smith probably had some sense of how his situation was being reported in his native country. Moreover, as a man who understood the workings of the period's nascent celebrity culture, he would have appreciated the value of keeping his image in circulation through the publication of a portrait print.

While likely ignorant of the reputation that his sitter enjoyed on the other side of the Channel, Hennequin would have been familiar with the general conventions of celebrity. The emergence of this new type of fame was a widespread Anglo-European phenomenon, which transcended national boundaries. Antoine Lilti's study of Enlightenment philosophes has provided ample evidence for the existence of an extensive culture of celebrity in eighteenth-century France.⁴⁴ However, it was not only the world of celebrity that inspired the drawing in *The Met*. Another source of inspiration came from a type of image that enjoyed significant public visibility in the wake of the French Revolution: the prison portrait.

PRISON PORTRAITURE

Against a backdrop of revolution, counterrevolution, and radical agitation, prison imagery appeared frequently in exhibition rooms and print shops on both sides of the Channel during the 1790s. Campaigners from across the political spectrum deployed prison-themed portraits for purposes of propaganda and



fig. 5 Edward Bell (British, act. 1794–1826) after John Westbrooke Chandler (British, 1764–1804/5). *Sir William Sidney Smith, K.S. of Sweden and Captain in His Majesty's Navy*, 1796. Mezzotint on paper, 19% × 13% in. (50.5 × 35.2 cm). British Museum, London (2010,7081.2807)

fig. 6 Louis Pierre Henriquel-Dupont (French, 1797–1892) after Joseph-Benoît Suvée (Flemish, 1743–1807). *Portrait of French Poet André Chénier*, 1838. Etching on chine collé, 13 $\frac{1}{16}$ × 8 $\frac{3}{16}$ in. (34.7 × 22.4 cm). British Museum, London (1927.1008.202)



fig. 7 Jacques Louis David (French, 1748–1825). *Thirius de Pautrizel*, June or July 1795. Pen and gray ink with gray wash and pale brown wash (on the face) over touches of graphite, heightened with white gouache on laid paper, laid down on an old circular mount, Diam. 7 $\frac{7}{16}$ in. (19.2 cm). Gift of Walter H. and Leonore Annenberg, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC (1990.47.2)

protest. Both Hennequin and Smith would have been aware of these images and the public fascination that they inspired. In Britain, sentimental images of Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, and other royal martyrs in their prison cells were used to stir up public outrage, the pathos of the regicide being invoked to justify the war against the French regime.⁴⁵ At the same time, prints and tokens depicting activists and journalists imprisoned under repressive government laws against “seditious libel” became rallying images for radical and opposition groups.⁴⁶ In France, meanwhile, the Revolution spawned numerous high-profile representations of prisons and their inmates. Initially, there were heroic images celebrating prisoners who had suffered under and courageously resisted the tyranny of the ancien régime.⁴⁷ However, the prison theme acquired a darker tone during the Reign of Terror in 1793–94. This period was the bloodiest phase of the Revolution, during which Maximilien Robespierre and his radical Jacobin allies took brutal measures against aristocrats, royalists, and moderates. An eventual backlash led to Robespierre’s deposition and execution in July 1794, after which the Jacobins found themselves facing persecution. A significant proportion of the prison imagery produced during this turbulent period was created within prisons, as was the case with Joseph-Benoît Suvée’s portrait of the poet André Chénier, who was imprisoned with the artist and sat for his portrait shortly before his execution. Suvée exhibited Chénier’s portrait at the Salon of 1795, along with images of four

other prisoners, and an etching after the painting was made in 1838 (fig. 6).⁴⁸ Other prison-made images circulated privately, such as the scenes of everyday prison life that the painter Hubert Robert produced during his incarceration, or the profile drawings that Jacques Louis David made of his fellow Jacobins after they had been detained, the artist included, for their roles in the Terror regime.⁴⁹

Many of these prison portraits expressed specific political positions. Suvée and his sitters, for example, were anti-Jacobin, while David’s profiles endeavored to reframe their disgraced subjects as true representatives of the people. However, scholars generally agree that, despite their differing political orientations, a shared tone of solemnity pervades these works. As Amy Freund argues, the prison portraits of this period sought to evoke “a kind of deathbed sincerity,” providing a visual analog to the written self-justifications of political prisoners and the last letters that the condemned wrote to their loved ones.⁵⁰ Various pictorial strategies were employed to achieve this effect. Discussing Suvée’s portrait of Chénier, Tony Halliday has shown how the sitter’s disheveled clothing and the artist’s viewpoint (looking slightly down on his subject) combined to create a sense of intimacy.⁵¹ David, meanwhile, peppered his profiles with carefully observed sartorial and physiognomic details, such as loose hairs escaping from queues, wrinkled skin, and gaping buttonholes, as exemplified in the portrait of Thirius de Pautrizel (fig. 7). Here, the specificity of the sitter’s face and clothing serves as a visual shorthand for his candor and sincerity.⁵² Since Hennequin was David’s former pupil and moved in similar political circles, he may have been





fig. 8 Philippe Auguste Hennequin. *Portrait of a Young Boy in Revolutionary Costume*, 1796. Pen and brown ink, 6¼ × 5¼ in. (16 × 13.4 cm). Sold at Artcurial, Paris, June 16, 2020

aware of David's works. His own drawing of an adolescent boy in Revolutionary costume (fig. 8), sketched in the Temple and dated a few weeks before the drawing in *The Met*, shares several features with David's prison portraits, including the profile format.⁵³ Crossing his arms over his chest, his liberty cap pulled down over his scraggly hair, Hennequin's grim-faced boy appears simultaneously defiant and defensive. Although his identity is unknown, it is clear that he was not a prominent Jacobin looking to expiate his controversial past, as David's sitters had been. Nevertheless, eschewing grandeur and pretension, his portrait typifies the earnest and introspective prison imagery of the Terror and its aftermath, a period of national, political, and

personal soul-searching for the Republic's leaders and citizens alike.

For Smith's portrait, however, Hennequin adopted a different visual mode. While the prevalence of prison portraiture in this period must have helped to inspire the creation of the drawing in *The Met*, it is more glamorous and theatrical than any of the above-mentioned works. As a foreign agent, Smith did not have to endure the same hardships and uncertainty as the French citizens with whom he shared his prison. Moreover, his portrait was intended to address an audience of British viewers, before whom Smith wished to appear heroic. Recognizing the distinctive demands of this commission, Hennequin eschewed the sensitive and politically

freighted imagery of contemporary French prison portraiture in favor of timeless tropes of stoic endurance.

Smith is shown reclining elegantly in his chair, his gaze drifting from his book to the barred window of his cell in a carefully staged display of calm dignity in the face of imprisonment. His status as an officer and a gentleman is affirmed through his richly decorated clothing, which includes his naval uniform coat and the insignia of his Swedish knighthood. He also sports tight-fitting trousers and calf-high Hessian boots, highlighting his distinctive personal style. At a time when most British naval officers still favored breeches, stockings, and buckled shoes, Smith's legwear marked him as a man of fashion who kept abreast of the latest trends.⁵⁴ With his coat swept back to expose his thighs, his legs are an important component of the portrait. As Karen Harvey has shown, the accentuation of the lower half of the male body in light-colored clothing functioned as a potent signifier of manhood in the eighteenth century.⁵⁵ In Smith's case, his legs act as a manifestation of masculine strength and self-possession, suggesting that, although captive, he remains physically and psychologically undiminished.

Prison imagery was a stock subject of pre-Revolutionary history painting, and Hennequin would have been familiar with examples such as David's *Death of Socrates* (1787; Metropolitan Museum) and François-André Vincent's *Arria and Paetus* (1784; Saint Louis Art Museum).⁵⁶ Featuring bare stone walls, minimal furnishings, and a barred window, his representation of the Temple prison in the drawing in *The Met* echoes the austere visual vocabulary of these historical works. Smith is thus framed as the protagonist in a heroic narrative of captivity and fortitude, recalling ennobling precedents in classical literature and historical art. However, other details within the portrait bring more specific anglophone references into play. As we shall see, allusions to well-known works of English literature further enriched the meaning of the portrait for the intended British audience.

POETIC REFERENCES

Two words are written on the pages of Smith's book: "tragedy" and "Caractacus." This inscription referred to a celebrated dramatic work by the eighteenth-century British poet William Mason, whose writings were highly regarded in his own time.⁵⁷ Modeled—in the author's words—"on the Ancient Greek [art of] tragedy," Mason's *Caractacus* was published in 1759 and later adapted for the stage, becoming an instant hit following its first performance in 1777. Twenty years later,

the text was included in *Bell's British Theatre*, confirming its place in the literary and theatrical canon of the day.⁵⁸ There was thus a good chance that British viewers of the portrait would have recognized the reference. Hennequin was probably not familiar with Mason's work, but Smith loved poetry and could recite his favorite passages of English, Latin, and French literature from memory.⁵⁹ It therefore seems likely that the captain devised this poetic reference, maybe even adding the words "tragedy" and "Caractacus" to the drawing himself.

The reference to a British poem was perhaps intended to demonstrate Smith's patriotic ardor. The subject matter of *Caractacus* was rich in patriotic significance, having been drawn from Britain's ancient past—a world of druids, bards, and warriors that was frequently invoked by eighteenth-century writers seeking to construct a British national mythology.⁶⁰ The poem is set during the Roman invasion of Britain in the first century A.D. The title character is a Celtic chieftain engaged in a doomed battle to defend his homeland. In a narrative full of warlike imagery, Caractacus is characterized as an inspiring military leader. By identifying himself with this fearsome warrior, Smith perhaps hoped to suggest his own martial prowess. Added to this, imprisonment was an important motif within the poem, serving as a foil for the ideal of liberty that was Mason's central theme.⁶¹ The story ends when Caractacus is captured and deported to Rome for incarceration, a fate that he accepts with dignity and grace. *Caractacus* was therefore an appropriate poem for Smith's situation, offering a literary model for the heroic endurance of captivity.

The lines of poetry inscribed on the drawing's mount are also drawn from Mason's oeuvre:

With what a leaden and retarding weight
Does expectation load the wing of time.

The pen of fate dipped in its deepest gall
Perhaps on that ill omen'd wall
Now writes the event of this tremendous day.
Oh! That our weaker sight
Could read the mystic characters & say
That to the unpurged mortal eye
Is hid in endless night.

Suspense! Thou frozen guest begone
The wretch whose rugged bed
Is spread on thorns, more softly rests his head
Than he that sinks amid the Cygnet's down
If thou tormenting fiend be nigh

To prompt his irksome doubt, his useless sigh
His wish, his prayer, for lingering certainty.

These lines come not from *Caractacus* but from Mason's earlier poem *Elfrida*, first published in 1752.⁶² Like *Caractacus*, *Elfrida* is a patriotic tragedy about a subject from British history. The plot follows the romantic tribulations of a tenth-century noblewoman (the eponymous heroine), culminating in her forced marriage to Edgar, king of England, after his murder of her beloved husband, Athelwold. Elfrida speaks the first two of the above-quoted lines near the beginning of the poem as she awaits her husband's return from the royal court.⁶³ The other stanzas inscribed on the mount are uttered later by the chorus. They highlight the suspense brought about by the arrival of Edgar at the home of Elfrida and Athelwold, his presence throwing the fates of the couple into jeopardy.⁶⁴

At first glance, *Elfrida*'s narrative of threatened female virtue seems to offer few parallels for Smith's situation as a prisoner of war. However, these particular passages appear to have been chosen because they foreground the psychological effects of uncertainty, referring to the "leaden and retarding weight" of expectation and the "frozen guest" of suspense. While not explicitly concerning prisoners, such sentiments recalled the melodramatic conception of imprisonment as a source of mental anguish that, as John Bender has shown, became a powerful part of the English literary imaginary during the eighteenth century.⁶⁵ On one level, then, the mount's poetic gloss invited viewers to sympathize with Smith's plight. At the same time, the captain's dignified composure in the portrait is far removed from the state of anxious insomnia described in the verses. The juxtaposition of text and image therefore served to enhance Smith's characterization as a stoic hero capable of rising above the stresses of captivity.

It is notable that the source of the poetic extracts on the mount is never mentioned. Without this information, the viewer is encouraged to assume that they come from the book in Smith's hand. The feminine themes of *Elfrida* are thus obscured in favor of the masculine associations of *Caractacus*. This is not necessarily a deliberate deception. If Smith added the verses to the portrait himself during his incarceration, he may not have had access to the original text. Quoting from memory, he could have confused one Mason poem with another. With its emphasis upon manly resistance and martial prowess, *Caractacus* was certainly better suited to the heroic tone of the portrait.

The addition of an anglophone literary gloss to the drawing appears to have been undertaken with a view to its publication as a print in Britain. Cosway copied precisely the portrait's poetic inscriptions in her etching, leading to the inclusion of the same lines in *A Congratulatory Poem on the Escape of Sir Sidney Smith from France, and His Happy Arrival in England*, which was published to commemorate the prison break that freed the captain in April 1798. The *Congratulatory Poem* included the following footnote, which perpetuated the misattribution of the verses to *Caractacus*, rather than *Elfrida*: "the above extract from Mason's *Caractacus* is introduced beneath the engraved Portrait of Sir Sidney Smith, as reading that dramatic poem, and taken originally, in the tower of the Temple, by Hennequin, a French artist."⁶⁶ This reference indicates that the portrait's poetic references did indeed inform how the print was presented to and understood by British audiences.

LEGACY

Reported in the British newspapers as a dramatic and opportunistic flight (although it was actually a well-planned and smoothly executed operation), Smith's escape from prison in 1798 reinvigorated his public profile and provided another opportunity for self-promotion, as the *Congratulatory Poem* demonstrates.⁶⁷ The identity of the poem's author is not known, but the text was widely recognized in the literary press as a puff piece originating from Smith's inner circle. The *British Critic*, for example, noted that "the zeal of friendship is more conspicuous in this poem than the fire of genius," and the *Critical Review* stated that it was "the production of one who is well acquainted with Sir Sydney."⁶⁸ The poem's reference to Hennequin's drawing and the resulting print suggests that the portrait remained relatively well known one year after its publication. It also demonstrates how successive visual and textual representations built upon one another to construct Smith's reputation.

This pattern continued throughout his career. Vying for attention against other successful naval officers, including, notably, Horatio Nelson (another talented self-publicist), Smith courted celebrity at every opportunity, making further use of portraiture to hone his flamboyant public image. For example, he was quick to capitalize upon his prominent role at the siege of Acre in spring 1799. As an officer in the Mediterranean fleet and a diplomatic envoy to the Ottoman court, Smith successfully reinforced the Turkish garrison in the city, enabling them to withstand a siege from

Napoleon's invading army.⁶⁹ Afterward, he commissioned the painter John Eckstein to produce a highly theatrical portrait celebrating his actions (fig. 9). Evoking heroic ideals of leadership and daring, Eckstein's image shows Smith brandishing his sword and leading Ottoman troops into battle, a Turkish sash tied raffishly around his waist. The portrait was publicly exhibited in 1802 and published in mezzotint the following year, joining numerous depictions of the same subject that were already circulating on the print market.⁷⁰ Examples include the *Defence of the Breach at St. Jean D'Acre by Sir William Sidney Smith* (fig. 10), which was engraved by Anthony Fogg after a painting by William Hamilton in 1802, and *The Gallant Behaviour of Sir Sydney Smith at the Seige [sic] of Acre*, which appeared as an illustration in George Courtney Lyttleton's three-volume *History of England* in 1803.⁷¹

These lively images of Smith's Turkish escapades came to some extent to dominate his public image, the siege of Acre supplanting his imprisonment in the public memory. Nevertheless, the portrait in The Met was not totally forgotten. Cosway's print after the

drawing was mentioned in two biographies produced at the end of Smith's life: Edward Howard's *Memoirs of Admiral Sir Sidney Smith* (1839), published the year before its subject's death, and John Barrow's *Life and Correspondence of Admiral Sir William Sidney Smith* (1848). The latter was based on Smith's own papers and autobiographical writings, which—in accordance with his lifelong desire to cultivate his reputation—he had left to his executors with instructions for their publication.⁷² The fact that Howard and Barrow refer to the print testifies to its lasting impact: it was remembered more than forty years after its creation.

Yet, while both biographers were aware that the portrait had been drawn inside the Temple prison, they erroneously declared that Cosway herself had produced the original sketch.⁷³ Barrow alleged that Cosway visited Smith in his cell: "among the female visitors at the Temple is mentioned Mrs. Cosway, who employed her pencil in taking [Smith's] miniature portrait."⁷⁴ Meanwhile, Howard claimed the portrait was based on surreptitious observation from the outside, suggesting that Cosway "contrived to obtain a sight of Sir Sidney from a window or by some other means, and made a sketch of him as he sat by the bars of his prison."⁷⁵ It is not clear what the sources were for these stories, but it is easy to understand why the idea of Cosway's authorship appealed. Naming Cosway as the drawing's creator enabled Howard and Barrow to frame the work's significance in terms of contemporary gender stereotypes. In their accounts, the portrait became an expression of the artist's "natural" feminine regard for a masculine hero. This interpretation echoed a wider theme within the two biographies, both of which stressed Smith's success in attracting the support and sympathy of women. For example, they asserted that he received secret aid during his incarceration from a trio of women living opposite the prison.⁷⁶ Barrow also published a poem supposedly written by "a young lady" upon receiving a copy of Cosway's etching. In this poem, the female author engages in a patriotic and sentimental reading of the image, tracing "in the mimic semblance . . . the pensive languor of a captive's breast" and hailing Smith as the object of "a nation's love."⁷⁷ The poem thus further entrenched the portrait within a discourse of feminine admiration, which occluded the ironies of its real history.

In erasing Hennequin from the story, Howard and Barrow sidestepped the most problematic aspects of the drawing's production. They did not have to acknowledge that its artist was a foreign revolutionary with radical beliefs, or that Smith had paid for his services,



fig. 9 John Eckstein (British, act. 1787–d. 1838). *Sir William Sidney Smith; Possibly Ahmad Pasha al-Jazzar ('Jazzar or Djezzar Pasha') and Two Unknown Men*, 1801–2. Oil on canvas, 93½ × 57 in. (237.5 × 144.8 cm). National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG 832)



fig. 10 Anthony Fogg (British, act. 1792–1806) after William Hamilton (British, 1751–1801). *Defence of the Breach at St. Jean D'Acre by Sir William Sidney Smith*, published April 7, 1802. Engraving, 21½ × 24 in. (53.5 × 60.9 cm). National Portrait Gallery, London (NPG D1367)

displaying what could be construed as a conceited interest in his own image. Such points would not have sat comfortably with the conventions of early Victorian naval biography, a genre that typically offered idealized depictions of national heroes.⁷⁸ However, it is the portrait's complex history that should concern scholars today. As this article has shown, Hennequin's drawing can be understood in the context of the eighteenth century's burgeoning culture of celebrity, the portrait having been designed with the intention of enhancing the sitter's public profile. It demonstrates how key aspects of celebrity culture, including the use of portraiture in the production of popular fame, transcended national and political divides. Despite their ideological differences, Hennequin recognized in Smith someone who appreciated the value of a portrait print. The result is a unique cross-cultural production, combining references to French art and English literature. The fact that it was conceived, executed, and sent for publication from within one of the most formidable prisons in Revolutionary Paris is a testament to the artist's resourcefulness in the face of bleak personal circumstances and to the resilience of the sitter's desire for publicity.

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NOTES

- 1 Smith's name is spelled "Sydney" in some historical sources.
- 2 William Sidney Smith II inherited the drawing from his uncle. His description of the portrait, featuring the reference to "solemn poetry," is pasted to the back of the drawing's mount.
- 3 The print's publication line reads "Published by the Proprietor at No. 91, New Bond Street," which was Poggi's address.
- 4 For Hennequin's release, see Hennequin 1933, 189n1.
- 5 For Cosway's life and career, see Lloyd 2005.
- 6 Jean-Clément Martin estimates that 500,000 people were incarcerated at some point between 1789 and 1799. See Bohm 2001, 3.
- 7 See Sophie Matthiesson's 2016 doctoral thesis on the prison-made object in the French Revolution.
- 8 For example, Lajer-Burchard 1994; Halliday 1999, 76–82; Freund 2014, 126–61; Baumgartner 2019.
- 9 The following account of Smith's career is based on Russell 1964 and Pocock 2013.
- 10 For Smith's espionage work, see Durey 1999.
- 11 Ibid., 441–42.
- 12 *The Times* (London), July 18 and 19, 1796; Durey 1999, 445.
- 13 Durey 1999, 444.
- 14 For British representations of the Temple, see Bindman 1989, 131.
- 15 Durey 1999, 451.
- 16 Howard 1839, 1:136.
- 17 Durey 1999, 449.
- 18 Ibid., 443.
- 19 The following account of Hennequin's career is based on Hennequin 1933 and Benoit 1994.
- 20 For the persecution of Babeuf and his followers, see Rose 1978.
- 21 See Hennequin 1933, 173–83, for the artist's imprisonment.
- 22 The original manuscripts are in the Archives et Musée de la Littérature, Brussels (ML 9398). De Haes 2007.
- 23 Hennequin 1933, 187–88.
- 24 Stein 2005, no. 69.
- 25 Hennequin 1933, 186.
- 26 Duke of Wellington to John Wilson Croker, 1826, in Jennings 1884, 1:348.
- 27 Durey 1999, 454.
- 28 For an overview of scholarship on eighteenth-century celebrity, see Wanko 2011.
- 29 For example, Luckhurst and Moody 2005; Mole 2007; Engel 2011.
- 30 Wanko 2011, 352.
- 31 Giles 2000, 2.
- 32 For example, Banister 2018, 151–84; Jones and Joule 2018, part 2; Scobie 2019.
- 33 For the idea of the "maritime nation," see Quilley 2011.
- 34 For eighteenth-century British naval officers' careers, see Rodger 2001 and Wilson 2017.
- 35 *London Packet*, January 15–17, 1794; *Sun* (London), January 17, 1794; *General Evening Post* (London), January 16–18, 1794; *London Chronicle*, January 16–18, 1794.
- 36 *Public Advertiser* (London), January 17, 1794.
- 37 *European Magazine*, July 1794, 3–4.
- 38 For Smith's iconography, see Walker 1985 (2020 ed.).
- 39 *European Magazine*, July 1794, 4.
- 40 For example, *Daily Advertiser* (London), April 22, 1796; *General Evening Post* (London), April 21–23, 1796; *Gentleman's Magazine* 66, part 1 (January–June 1796): 346.
- 41 *Evening Mail* (London), April 20–22, 1796.
- 42 Marshall 1997, 4–6.
- 43 Burke 1797, 22. See also *Parliamentary Register* 5 (1798): 320 and *The Senator* 20 (1797): 607.

- 44 Lilti 2017. See also Kathryn Desplanque's work on eighteenth-century French artists and celebrity; Desplanque 2016.
- 45 Barrell 1998; Bindman 1989, 131.
- 46 For examples, see Bindman 1989, 190–206, and Barrell 2007.
- 47 Examples include Antoine Vestier's portrait of Henri Masers de Latude (Musée Carnavalet, Paris), which was exhibited at the Salon of 1789 and published as an etching. Latude was famed for his escape from the Bastille.
- 48 Suvée's *Chénier* is in a private collection. See Join-Lambert and Leclair 2017, no. P.178, and Halliday 1999, 76–82.
- 49 For Robert's prison portraits, see Baumgartner 2019; for David's, see Lajer-Burchard 1994.
- 50 Freund 2011, 336.
- 51 Halliday 1999, 76–78.
- 52 Freund 2014, 76–77.
- 53 This drawing was sold in *Maîtres anciens & du XIX^e siècle*, sale cat., Artcurial, Paris, June 16, 2020, lot 88.
- 54 For boots in eighteenth-century fashion, see McCormack 2017.
- 55 Harvey 2015, 807.
- 56 Lorenz Eitner (1978) provides an overview of eighteenth-century prison imagery.
- 57 For Mason's career, see Draper 1924 and Addison 2011.
- 58 *Caractacus* appeared in *Bell's British Theatre* 31 (1797). For the poem (Mason 1759), see Addison 2011, 86–91.
- 59 Barrow 1848, 2:471.
- 60 For ancient Britain in eighteenth-century art, see Smiles 1994.
- 61 Addison 2011, 87.
- 62 *Elfrida* was adapted for the stage in 1772 and included in *Bell's British Theatre* 34 (1797).
- 63 Mason 1752, 12.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 42. The penultimate line on the drawing diverges from Mason's text, which reads "To prompt his starting tear, his ceaseless sigh."
- 65 Bender 1987.
- 66 Anonymous 1798, 13–14. Many thanks to Christina J. Faraday for facilitating my access to this text.
- 67 For Smith's escape, see Durey 1999.
- 68 *British Critic* 12 (1798): 667; *Critical Review* 24 (1798): 352.
- 69 For Smith's role in the Siege of Acre, see Pocock 2013, 104–30.
- 70 Anthony Cardon's stipple engraving of Eckstein's portrait was published on January 1, 1803; an impression is in the British Museum, London (1857,0613.288). For the portrait's exhibition history, see Walker 1985 (2020 ed.).
- 71 Lyttleton 1803, vol. 3, facing p. 513. An impression of *The Gallant Behaviour of Sir Sydney Smith* can be seen in the British Museum, London (1873,0510.1240).
- 72 Barrow 1848, 1:v–ix.
- 73 Cosway may have produced a painting based on the drawing, since a note on the reproduction of the drawing in the Courtauld Institute of Art's Witt Library refers to a painted version of the portrait (currently untraced) that was with Brumhead, Cutts and Co., London, in 1920. Benoit 1994, 145.
- 74 Barrow 1848, 1:207.
- 75 Howard 1839, 1:135.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 111–12; Barrow 1848, 1:200–201.
- 77 Barrow 1848, 1:207–8.
- 78 Hamilton 1980.

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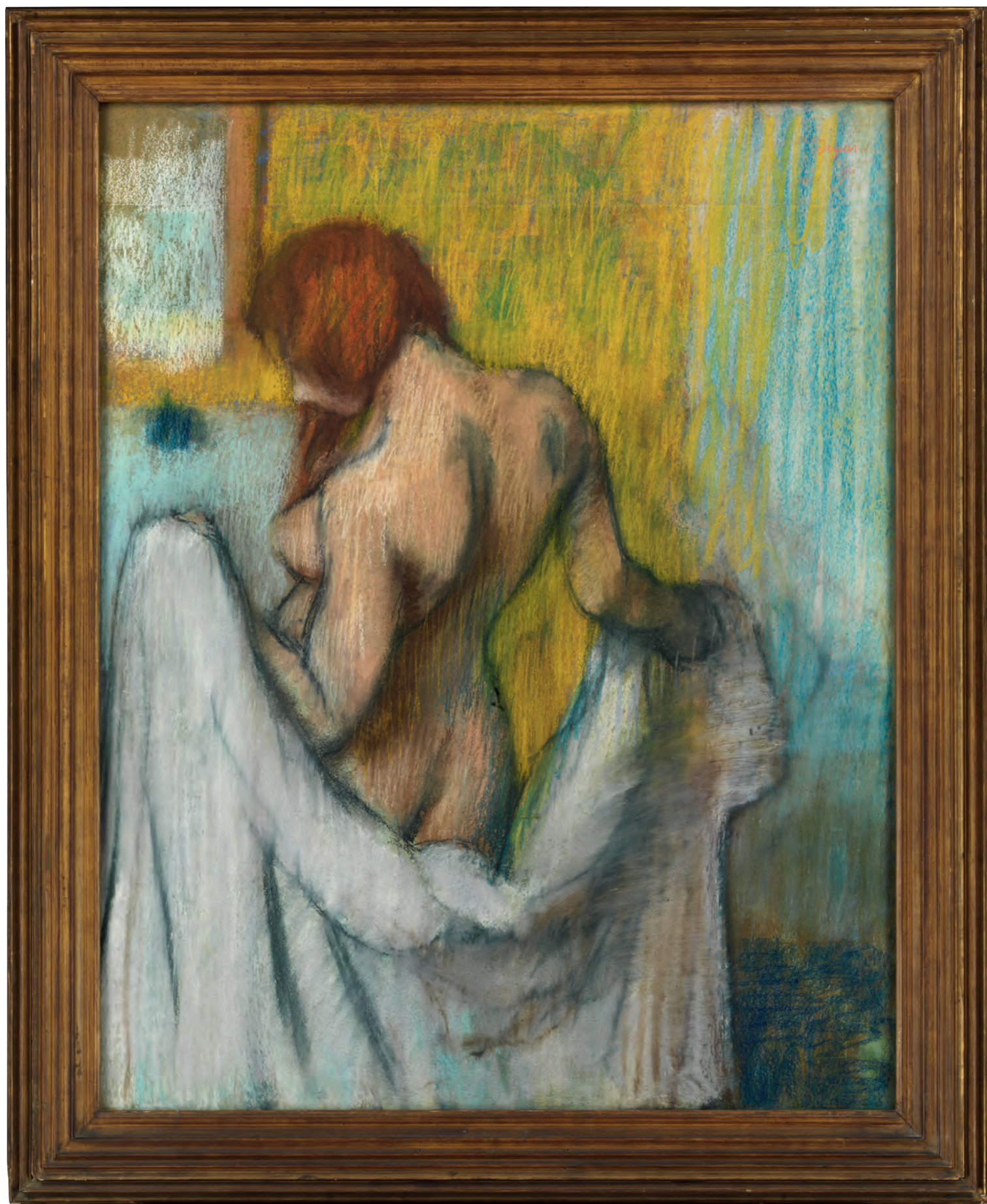
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Artists' Frames in *Pâte Coulante*: History, Design, and Method

PETER MALLO

During the final decades of the nineteenth century in Paris and London, methods for presenting exhibitions were undergoing a major reconsideration, and frames from this era began to take on a new role both visually and conceptually. This development was driven by artists to indicate that their works represented a new kind of vision. Many original frames have disappeared from the walls of private collections and museums, but it is possible to piece together concept and approach through photographs, treatises, drawings, catalogues, and a few precious extant frames. This study focuses on artist-designed frames at the end of the nineteenth century with a particular emphasis on a material known as *pâte coulante*, unique in its ability to render extraordinary profiles, some of which could not have been realized by any

fig. 1 Degas pastel housed in a cockscomb frame: Edgar Degas (French, 1834–1917). *Woman with Towel*, 1894 or 1898. Pastel on cream-colored wove paper with red and blue fibers throughout, 37¾ × 30 in. (95.9 × 76.2 cm); framed: 44¼ × 36¼ × 1½ in. (112.4 × 92.1 × 4.8 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (29.100.37)



other method available at the time. Many noteworthy period frames that utilize *pâte coulante* are preserved within the Havemeyer collection at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Although frames in *pâte coulante* can be seen surrounding the works of many late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century paintings, this study refers to the few superb frames available for study in The Met and in private collections, which in many cases surround works by Edgar Degas (fig. 1). For artists like Degas, this method became crucial for executing radical frame designs. To reinforce the argument that the process of template-cut *pâte coulante* granted artists and frame-makers the freedom to reliably turn any design into a serviceable molding, period-correct moldings were re-created using the available historical information, and reflections gleaned from this technical study are included herein.

EXHIBITIONS AND FRAMES SHIFT AWAY FROM THE SALON

The year 1874 marks an important turning point for artists challenging the status quo. It saw not only the first one-person exhibition by James McNeill Whistler in London, but also the inaugural show of the Anonymous Society of Artists, Painters, Sculptors, Engravers, Etc., in Paris, the group that critic Louis Leroy would satirically dub the “Impressionists.”¹ In both cases, we see the avant-garde taking greater control over the presentation of their works and the total art environment, including the way their works were framed.

Both Whistler and the Impressionists claimed to have originated the idea of harmony between painting and frame. In 1873, Degas employed simple frames for a series of pastels titled *Répétition de ballet* that one of his most supportive collectors, Louisine Havemeyer, described as being painted “soft dull gray and green which harmonized with the decorations of the scenery and . . . dresses of the ballerina.”² The same year, Whistler wrote to collector George A. Lucas:

You will notice and perhaps meet with opposition that my frames I have designed as carefully as my pictures—and thus they form as important a part as any of the rest of the work—carrying on the particular harmony throughout. This is of course entirely original with me and has never been done . . . and I wish this to also be clearly stated in Paris that I am the inventor of all this kind of decoration . . . that I may not have a lot of little Frenchmen trespassing on my ground.³

Regardless of who arrived at the idea first, the shared impulse to invent new styles of frames was part of a larger thrust to recontextualize works of art by reimagining the viewing experience.⁴ Underrepresented at established venues like the Paris Salon in the early 1870s, the Impressionists took issue with many of the practices standardized by the Salon and set out instead to create an entirely new format for exhibiting their work. In an open letter to the jury of the Paris Salon in 1870, Degas suggested six tiers of reform in the presentation of art. These reforms related specifically to strategies for hanging works, but Degas’s ultimate goal was to show individual works of art to their best effect. In his closing statement, Degas urges: “In short, once you have satisfied your judges’ pride, be good interior decorators.”⁵

One hallmark of the Salon was large frames, usually composed of a running molding over which was applied layers of cast classical decoration (fluting, lamb’s tongue, acanthus). The scale of Salon frames had an important purpose: when paintings were hung edge to edge, artists relied on the wide moldings to create space among neighboring paintings.

Rejecting the Salon system altogether, Impressionists sought their own gallery space, and some began conceiving frame styles that would underscore the freshness of their vision: linear running moldings with no applied decoration whatsoever. At first glance, these experimental frame profiles seem simplistic when compared to the heavily ornamented frames used by their contemporaries in the mainstream. Their formal elegance came from the shape of the profiles themselves, which were delicately designed to give a sense of harmony between painting and frame through use of restrained color and shadow pattern.

The most recognizable of these styles are the reeded frames by Whistler, and the fluted cushion frames by Degas. They shared formal elements like reeded friezes and fluted columns with the neoclassical thrust that was informing mainstream frame design of the late nineteenth century (fig. 2). They hearken back to miniature columns found on fifteenth-century tabernacle frames, which in turn come from the structural columns of ancient Greek architecture. In frames as in architecture, these historical elements had traditionally been paired with decorative flourishes like protruding acanthus, scrolls, stacked coins, and other classical motifs that act as focal points. The new styles, by contrast, incorporated only those linear elements that would create a subtle play of light and shadow across the surface of the profile.

fig. 2 Left: facade of the Grand Palais, Paris, completed in 1900. Right: a finely fluted late 19th-century frame



Pâte Coulante: From Necessity to Opportunity

Though the shapes we see in the most adventurous of these new designs seem radical, and in some cases extraordinarily complex, they could be made efficiently and at low cost by borrowing a process that had been mastered for architectural moldings many centuries earlier. This process allowed artists and frame-makers to experiment with shapes that could not have been executed in wood and with a material that was already on hand in frame-making ateliers.

Pâte coulante, which translates to “flowing paste,” was initially adopted as an inexpensive alternative to machine-milled profiles in wood for running moldings. The financial woes felt by the Impressionists during the 1870s and 1880s are well documented, but artists and dealers were not the only ones experiencing economic challenges. During the 1850s and 1860s, in addition to being physically reconstructed under the direction of Baron Haussmann, Paris was experiencing a major shift in the marketplace for luxury goods. One economic result of Haussmannization was a trend away from expensive bespoke craft, and toward less costly mass-market manufacturing.⁶ Frame-makers of the period were pressed to find quick and cost-effective ways to keep up with demand for large, ornamented frames suitable for the Salon, and began to use *pâte coulante* for both cast ornament and template-cut moldings.

The earliest usage of the term *pâte coulante* for frame-making is found in the 1896 edition of *Nouveau manuel complet du fabricant de cadres, passe-partout, châssis, encadrements, etc.* published under the widely popular *Encyclopédie-Roret*.⁷ The *Manuels-Roret*, written primarily for amateurs, are nevertheless an important asset for outlining popular late nineteenth-century processes in art and agriculture and gauging when certain processes entered the mainstream. *Pâte coulante* was

not included in the 1850 edition of *Nouveau manuel complet du fabricant de cadres*,⁸ so its inclusion in the 1896 edition suggests that the process, which may have been experimental as early as the 1870s, had been widely adopted by the close of the century.

Although *pâte coulante* appears to have been a relative novelty for frame-makers during the early years of Impressionism, the practice of pulling a form across a paste-like material via a sled or rail system has its roots in architectural antiquity.⁹ In execution, it also relates to the use of a wave machine for manufacturing ripple moldings, a style of ornamentation that has come to be associated with seventeenth-century Dutch frames.¹⁰ Unlike common architectural plaster, *pâte coulante* can be built up quickly, is much more durable, is able to take a burnish over gilding, and gives the maker extended working time.

Pâte coulante had additional advantages over composition, a material used extensively for creating the raised decoration on Barbizon frames. Composition is prepared from chalk, glue, oil, and resin, combined into a stiff heavy dough, then pressed into rigid molds, and eventually transferred to the wooden frame chassis in strips of continuous repeating patterns, or sculpted forms such as acanthus leaves. Composition accepts gilding beautifully, but is very heavy and prone to shrinkage. *Pâte coulante* was lighter, less expensive, easier to formulate, and resisted shrinking, giving frame-makers the ability to manufacture complicated moldings and decoration at a fraction of the cost of wood-milling machines, let alone hand carvers. The frame-maker J. Saulo outlines the basic process:

Once we began to make paste frames, the profile was entirely made of wood, even in its smallest details. . . . This method was certainly time consuming and very expensive, but the product was, by comparison, also much stronger. With progress manifested the need to produce cheaply; we then simplified this work by merely indicating, in the wood, the general sinuosity of the profile. In order to obtain the details, we made iron templates in the modern manner to reproduce the exact profile of the moldings. . . . It is, as we see, certainly very practical and inexpensive.¹¹

Adopted out of necessity to support the mass production of conventional Salon frames, *pâte coulante* also opened a path to the production of individualized artists' frames. At the very moment frame-makers had developed a process to render virtually any of the elaborate traditional shapes demanded by the Salon, artists rebelling against the Salon were looking to reconceive the frame itself. In some cases, artists and framers began

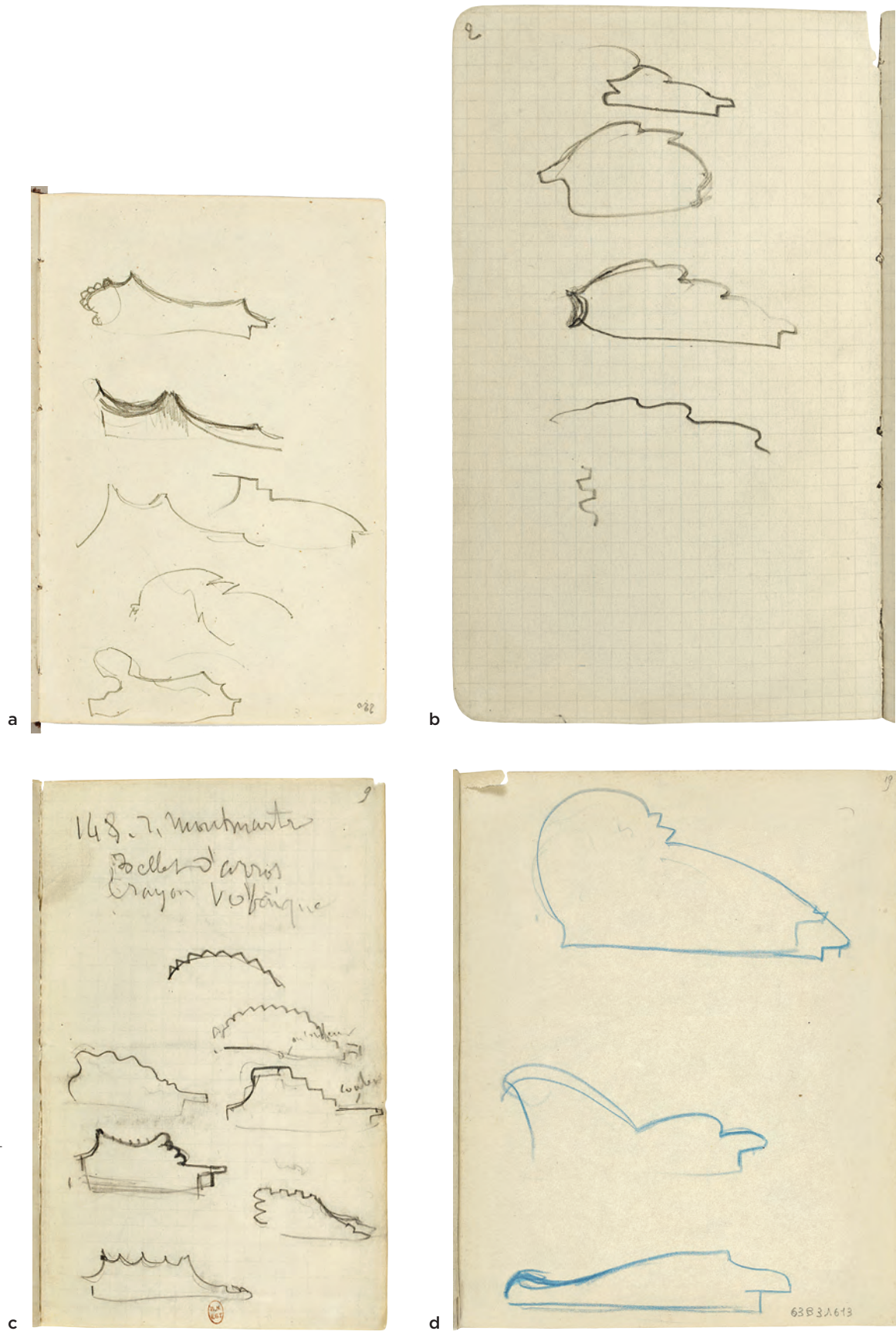


fig. 3a-d Frame profile sketches from Degas's notebooks preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris. The books are dated between 1870 and 1913. (a) Notebook no. 2 (b) Notebook no. 6 (c) Notebook no. 9 (d) Notebook no. 23

working together to use this paste-and-template process to realize aesthetic innovations. Frames designed by artists became extensions of their work, having been drawn by their own hand, cut out in template form, and rendered directly into a running frame molding.

FRAME DESIGNS OF THE NEW AESTHETIC

Unlike the heavily ornamented frames used for Salon-style exhibitions, template-cut frames in *pâte coulante* exhibit an elegant cohesiveness, especially the models associated with Degas in Paris. These moldings, seemingly inspired by his drawings (fig. 3a–d), were conceived as a single contour. Some of the drawings are labored over, others only barely indicated, but all have gesture and a certain flow, as in a signature or the sketch of a silhouette, and could be easily transposed onto a hard material and cut out as a template.

Template-shaped *pâte coulante* is well suited to realize designs that employed the repetition of refined elements: reeds, flutes, and waves, which in turn follow or flow over simple shapes such as flats or cushions. Degas's *crête de coq* (cockscorn) design (figs. 1, 7) is vaguely cushion-shaped (a convex quarter-round molding, usually symmetrical), yet its features do not repeat; they become more pronounced across the molding front to back, joining soft waves and sharp serrations, and creating extreme variations in the quality of reflected light. Frames like the cockscorn contain deeply curved undercuts coupled with subtle undulations that cannot be made efficiently in wood or composition, giving template-shaped *pâte coulante* a unique place in the manufacture of running moldings.

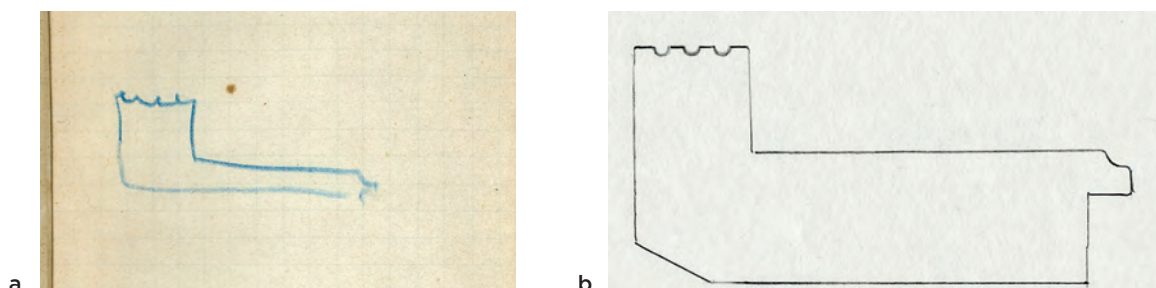
Substantial credit is due to frame-makers for the development of artists' frames, certainly for their willingness to support the new aesthetic, and in some cases as potential design collaborators. Pierre Cluzel's involvement with the avant-garde is well documented, mentioned by numerous painters in their correspondence, and responsible for fabricating some of the most iconic designs associated with Degas. We know from Camille Pissarro's letters to his son Lucien that Cluzel would show and sometimes sell Pissarro's paintings from his

maison at 33, rue Fontaine Saint-George in Paris. Cluzel is described by Pissarro as being one of the most skilled craftsmen in Paris, and a particularly shrewd businessman.¹² Pissarro was in the habit of ordering his surrounds through Lucien, and although Pissarro does not seem to have created designs for execution in *pâte coulante*, their correspondence provides a valuable glimpse into the relationship between artist and framer-designer, which seemed mostly amiable, with some occasional tension over bills owed and differences in aesthetics. One letter from Camille Pissarro to his son stands out, suggesting that Cluzel would sometimes impress his own aesthetic upon Pissarro's orders: "I did have some borders made in the English style by Cluzel, but as always, Cluzel had the fancy to add to these matte oak edges a white margin in relief on the painting . . . it cast a shadow on the canvas that is most unpleasant and he asks a crazy price for this beautiful work."¹³

The relationship between Degas and Cluzel also merits mention in connection to the evolution of designs associated with Degas. Due to the outstanding bill that Degas owed upon Cluzel's death in 1894, we know that Degas patronized his boutique regularly.¹⁴ Maison Cluzel is mentioned in only a few of Degas's letters to his dealers Paul Durand-Ruel and Theo van Gogh, and only in reference to bills he owed.¹⁵ Letters addressed personally to or from Cluzel are not found in Degas's correspondence. This should not be surprising: Degas's studio was only a few blocks from Maison Cluzel in Montmartre, and Degas's paint supplier had his shop just next door to Cluzel at 31, rue Fontaine, so it seems likely that Degas and Cluzel conducted their business in person.

Because we lack written descriptions of their interactions, as we have for Pissarro, the impact Cluzel had on Degas's designs remains speculative. A close look at the extant frames by Cluzel on Degas's works, however, offers some valuable clues. We find the label of Maison Cluzel on three of Degas's works preserved at The Met. They are noteworthy, for while they bear resemblances to designs from Degas's sketchbook, the finished frames exhibit more refinement (figs. 4a, b, 5, 6a–d). In the case of Degas's cockscorn molding, the extant frames in this

fig. 4a, b Sketch by Degas for the flat-paneled "passe partout" frame; profile drawing taken by the author from the frame by Maison Cluzel



format exhibit much more variety in terms of form and scale than the closest sketch we have from Degas (figs. 7a–d). It is certainly possible that Degas provided a sketch for Cluzel that is now lost. It is equally possible that Degas and Cluzel developed this shape together.¹⁶

Evolving Tastes and the Rarity of the Artist's Frame

Over the last thirty years, there has been growing interest in uniting paintings with frames of their own era. Museums are joining paintings with their original surrounds when possible and utilizing antiques when the original is lost. Matching a painting with a frame from the same period is ideal, especially when it is possible to locate a style of frame approved by the artist. Late nineteenth-century Salon frames can be found, but with some exceptions they are antithetical to the intentions of the artists who were trying to distance themselves from the Salon system.

Museum visitors may well wonder why some works by the avant-garde are presented in conventional frames, while others feature borders that are entirely unique. Not

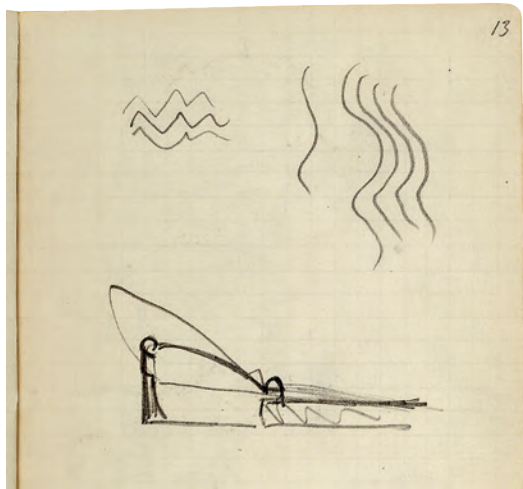
all artists associated with Impressionism felt compelled to use the progressive frame designs of their colleagues. Monet did not design his own frames, and was in the habit of asking his dealer to choose frames for him.¹⁷ In one particular correspondence he expresses his fondness for antique frames,¹⁸ and photographic evidence from his studio at Giverny shows his works housed in neobaroque, Louis XIV, and Barbizon frame styles. Renoir shared Monet's interest in traditional framing, proclaiming his preference for "old frames carved from hardwood, where we feel the hand of the worker."¹⁹

Museums looking to pair an avant-garde painting with a progressive model from the late nineteenth century may find it difficult to locate such a frame, since they were customarily discarded over the years as paintings changed ownership and tastes evolved. This was the fate of many of Degas's painted frames, even though Degas is known to have stipulated that his works must stay with their frames.²⁰ The dealer Ambroise Vollard recounts that Degas once repossessed a painting in anger upon finding that one of his frames had been removed.²¹ Even

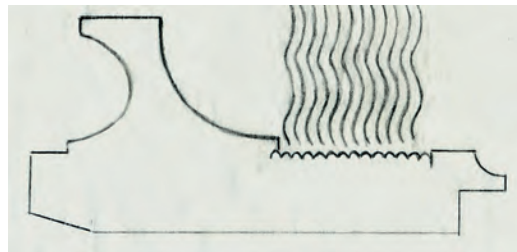


fig. 5 Period frame by Cluzel that houses Edgar Degas, *The Collector of Prints*, 1866. Oil on canvas, 20 7/8 × 15 1/4 in. (53 × 40 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (29.100.44)





a



b



c

fig. 6a-d (a) Sketch by Degas (b) Profile drawing taken by the author from the Cluzel frame (c) and (d) Period frame by Cluzel that houses Edgar Degas, *Sulking*, 1870. Oil on canvas, 12¾ × 18¾ in. (32.4 × 46.4 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, H. O. Havemeyer Collection, Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929 (29.100.43)



d



fig. 7a-d (a) Sketch by Degas (b) Profile drawing taken by the author of the period cockscomb frame by Cluzel (c) (d) Period frame by Cluzel that houses Degas, *Woman with Towel*, 1894 or 1898 (fig. 1)

Degas's cockscomb frames, which Vollard described as one of Degas's favorite types, have disappeared, except for two surviving examples (The Met; Musée d'Orsay, Paris).²² A photograph of Max Liebermann's living room in Berlin, 1932, suggests that Degas's *Frieze of Dancers*, now at the Cleveland Museum of Art, was once housed in a white cockscomb-style frame (fig. 8).²³

Some designs were seen as being too radical, and it should come as little surprise that a white cockscomb border would have stood out in many settings. Degas's painted frames may have appeared too plain or unfinished against the gilded decor of many a collector, and dealers found it easier to sell a painting if it was housed in a conventional gold frame. We get the sense from Pissarro's letters that he sometimes quarreled with his dealers who were upset at the lack of gilding on his frames.²⁴ Durand-Ruel in particular favored a gilded Louis XVI-revival pattern for many works that passed through his gallery. By the 1890s dealers were able to begin selling works by the Impressionists more steadily, giving the artists

much-needed financial security and the dealers themselves more leverage over presentation.

Yet even when a work was sold in an artist's frame, it was common practice for collectors to rehouse the work in a border that harmonized with the rest of their collection. Some collectors employed what is known as a house style for their framing, which had the effect of homogenizing the presentation of works by different artists, and at the same time impressed the stamp of ownership on the individual work.²⁵

The disappearance of the original frames may also have something to do with the material itself. In the case of a finely modeled frame in *pâte coulante*, certain kinds of damage are very difficult to repair. If a section of the molding was crushed or lost (fig. 9), it may have been easier for a collector or an institution to replace the frame rather than try to re-create the lost section. This is due largely to the fact that the wooden substrate underneath the *pâte coulante* does not inform the details we see on the top of the molding, which makes the re-creation of those details very difficult.

fig. 8 Degas, *Frieze of Dancers* (ca. 1895; Cleveland Museum of Art), was once housed in what appears to be a cockscomb-style frame.

fig. 9 A damaged late 19th-century frame made with template-shaped *pâte cou-lante*. Musée d'Orsay, Paris



METHOD AND TECHNICAL INSIGHTS

Extant artists' frames in *pâte cou-lante* from the late nineteenth century are rare and therefore seldom available for structural analysis. One exception is a singularly designed period frame in *pâte cou-lante* attributed to Maison Cluzel that was once owned by Parisian antique frame dealer Christophe Nobile.²⁶ Its shape bears some resemblance to the two cockscomb frames

original to Degas's *Bathers* at The Met and Musée d'Orsay, Paris,²⁷ but the individual elements that make up the molding are a mixture of large and small reeds, blades, and curls. The state of the frame was in disrepair when it entered Nobile's inventory, and in order to restore it and reinforce the joinery, he was forced to open it at the miters. This afforded him the opportunity to study the construction details via the cross section (fig. 10a, b). The wooden base was assembled from rather simply shaped slats laid over one another. The built-up layers of paste make up a large amount of the molding, which suggests that this design might have been modified and expanded during fabrication. The view of the cross section of such a unique example was elucidating in itself, but raised challenging questions regarding execution that were difficult to answer: what are the working properties of a material that is hard enough to withstand handling but not prone to shrinkage, and how efficiently could that material be built up to this extent? The technical analysis that follows offers some illumination.

The most detailed instructions for making *pâte cou-lante* appear in the 1905 edition of William Millar's landmark treatise on architectural plasterwork,

*Plastering, Plain and Decorative.*²⁸ Millar's recipe comprises materials found in nineteenth-century frame shops and plaster studios alike: fine plaster, chalk (whiting), rabbit skin glue, and alum (potassium aluminum sulfate). Although the exact ratio of elements is not specified in Millar's or any other treatise from the era, the basic principle is that fast-setting plaster is added to traditional gesso (chalk and rabbit skin glue) so that the artisan can build layers quickly; the plaster gives the mixture form, and the gesso gives the mixture hardness. Through trial and error, it was apparent that the properties of the material are sensitive to each other, and the ratios are dependent on the application. A higher ratio of glue provides added strength to the cured paste, but it is too springy to be cut properly under the template and is therefore best used for cast ornament. The guiding criterion for a recipe of *pâte coulante* for this study was the combination of properties common to traditional gesso and composition: the material must be able to accept bole for gilding and

fig. 10a, b (a) Period frame once owned by Christophe Nobile (b) Reproduction corner made by the author based on Nobile's notes and measurements from the original



a

hard enough to take a fine burnish; it should not compress under the pressure from burnishing; and it must be dense enough to resist scratching.

As mentioned in the period manual by J. Saulo above, a wooden substructure following the general shape of the finished profile is essential. A wooden interior frame, preferably hollow, will keep the weight down and provide traditional joinery options for the frame-maker. The paste is heavier than the wood, and throughout the process the paste contributes moisture to the wooden base. It is therefore worth the effort to match the wooden substructure to the shape of the finished molding as closely as possible (fig. 11). The late nineteenth-century method for keeping the wood stationary during the application of the paste remains unclear. Given the similarities between cutting *pâte coulante* for frame moldings and cutting plaster for interior moldings, it is conceivable that framers were familiar with the process of fixing a metal template onto a wooden chassis with a fence (fig. 12).²⁹

The templates for shaping *pâte coulante* specified in the manual by J. Saulo of 1896 are made of iron. The treatise of plastering techniques by Millar of 1905 suggests thin sheet metal. No period photographs or diagrams that describe the system used by frame-makers for the traveling template were found. For the purposes of this study, a track system was developed by the author that would give the best chances for reliable results.

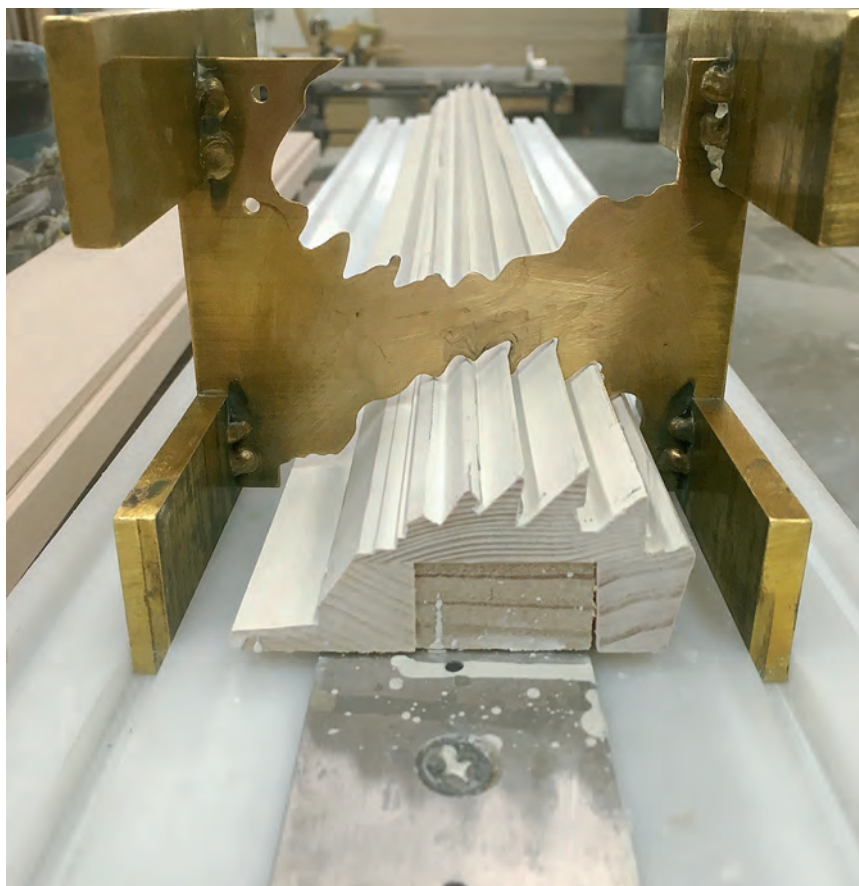
Like the process for molding plaster, *pâte coulante* is applied soft and run over with the template until the material can hold its shape. The maker can add fresh paste and recut as soon as the prior coat begins to stiffen, provided the track, chassis, and template are kept wet and running smoothly. The fineness of the template is critically important to the efficiency of this process; if the cutting edge is carefully smoothed, then there is no need to sand the finished molding. This must have been an immense boon for framers who manufactured profiles that required absolute uniformity from molding to molding. A more refined surface texture is achieved by switching from *pâte coulante* to



b

fig. 11 The wooden sub-structure for this cocks-comb frame follows the template closely.

fig. 12 The various parts of the template for making running moldings in plaster described in William Millar's treatise on plastering from 1905



thin gesso for the last few passes once the molding is massed out, which gives the surface an ultra-smooth, polished texture, as seen on some period examples.

The lengths of finished and well-dried moldings are then cut and trued to 45 degrees. Performing a preliminary cut with a bandsaw, which was available in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century,³⁰ and then smoothing the miter by sanding yields the best gluing surface. Closing the seam of the miter takes some patience. Microscopically, *pâte coulante* shears much more cleanly than wood fibers on a miter cut. Additionally, some small expansion occurs when aqueous glues are applied to wood. These factors contribute to a hairline gap on the face of the miter, and

some delicate filling is always required. The seam may require many light fills with the aqueous gesso until the moldings are consolidated. Once the seams are mended, the frame can be treated as one would a traditional gesso frame; the surface will take bole or paint.

Template-cut *pâte coulante* moldings can also be integrated with traditional woodworking. One fine example is the well-known passe-partout on Degas's *Collector of Prints* at The Met (see fig. 5). The chassis of the frame is fabricated very much like a traditional cassetta frame, with broad, flat boards keyed from the back. The fluted molding is glued to the face of the frame. Damage to the flutes reveals that the decoration is shaped in paste about 1/8 inch thick over a square

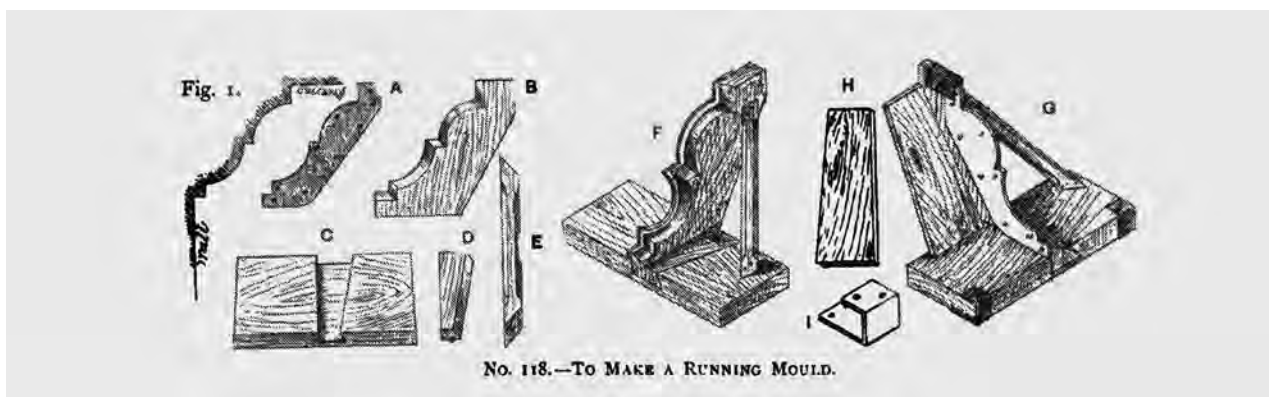
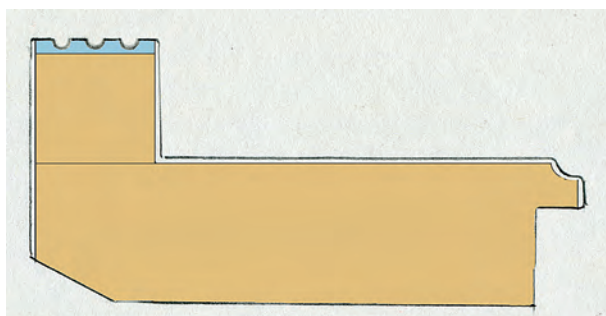


fig. 13 The construction details for the period frame by Cluzel that houses Degas, *The Collector of Prints* (fig. 5). Template-shaped *pâte coulante* is indicated in light blue over a two-piece wooden substructure. The gesso layer (white) covers the rest of the profile and hides the transition between the *pâte coulante* and the wood.



wooden rail. After the molding was mitered and glued to the frame, the whole chassis received gesso in the traditional manner (fig. 13).

Because so many of the original models have been lost, research pertaining to artists' frames is challenging. Nevertheless, period treatises on construction practices, artists' correspondence, and the few extant models reveal an intricate link between process and design. The multitude of factors that contributed to the frame inventions of the late nineteenth century offer critical insight into artists' working practices, and illuminate not only the paint-

ings from that era, but also the economic climate, prevailing tastes in architecture and interior design, and the proliferation of aesthetic ideas and processes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the many colleagues who offered their knowledge and support in the research for this article. For their generosity I especially thank Cynthia Moyer at the Metropolitan Museum; and Christophe Nobile, owner of Maison Samson, Paris. For offering their technical expertise I thank Tracy Gill, Simeon Lagodich, and Yozo Suzuki of Gill & Lagodich Fine Period Frame Gallery, New York; Ross Caudill at the Guggenheim Museum, New York; and Jared Bark of Bark Frameworks. I also thank David Horowitz of the Guggenheim Museum for his close read and valuable insights into an early version of this article.

PETER MALLO

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NOTES

- 1 Leroy 1874.
- 2 Havemeyer 1993, 250.
- 3 Whistler to Lucas, January 18, 1873, preserved at the Walters Art Museum Library, Baltimore.
- 4 The task of tracking design trends is complicated by a competitive attitude that developed in the 1880s between Whistler in London and some of the Impressionists in Paris. With regard to intimately choreographed spaces, both sides claimed ownership. Writing to his son in London in 1883, Camille Pissarro laments that the Impressionists are not receiving their due credit: "How I regret not to have seen the Whistler show . . . he is even a bit too pretentious for me, aside from this I should say that for the room white and yellow is a charming combination. The fact is that we ourselves made the first experiments with colors. . . . But we poor little rejected painters lack the means to carry out our concepts of decoration." (Rewald 2002, 22–23). It is also important to note that some frame styles that have been named after certain artists, like Whistler, may not be entirely of their invention. Known for his keen sense of interior design, Whistler was initially influenced by the design trends begun by the Pre-Raphaelites, and by architects like Thomas Jeckyll (Soros and Arbuthnott 2003, 190–97), with whom he collaborated on the Peacock Room, now in the National Museum of Asian Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC. In terms of frame design, Whistler does seem to be the most vital conduit for ideas between Paris and London. Whistler lived and worked in Paris in the early stages of his career, and even after settling in London, he is known to have had some of his frame designs executed in Paris (Cahn 1989, 63).
- 5 Edgar Degas to the jury of the 1870 Salon, *Paris Journal*, April 12, 1870, reprinted in Kendall 1987, 99–100.
- 6 For an excellent summary of the shift to mass-market manufacturing, see Clark 1999, 46–52.
- 7 Saulo and St-Victor 1896.
- 8 St-Victor 1850.
- 9 Millar 1905, 1–24, 296–323.
- 10 Thornton 2002.
- 11 "Quand on commença à faire des cadres en pâte, le profil était entièrement fait de bois, jusque dans ses menus détails. . . . Ce procédé était certainement d'un emploi très long et fort onéreux, mais le produit était, par contre, aussi beaucoup plus solide. Avec le progrès s'est manifestée la nécessité de produire à bon marché; on a alors simplifié ce travail en se contentant d'indiquer seulement, dans le bois, les sinuosités générales du profil. Pour obtenir les détails, on a fait des gabarits en fer reproduisant en à-jour les moulures exactes du profil. . . . C'est, comme on voit, certainement très pratique et peu dispendieux." Saulo and St-Victor 1896, 13.
- 12 Bailly-Herzberg 1980, 340, 341; 1986, 172, 229.
- 13 "J'ai fait faire des bordures dans le genre anglais par Cluzel, mais comme toujours, Cluzel a eu la fantaisie d'ajouter à ces bordures en chêne mat une marge blanche en relief sur la peinture . . . cela fait une ombre sur la toile des plus désagréables et il demande un prix fou pour ce beau travail." Bailly-Herzberg 1988, 435 (March 1, 1894).
- 14 "Inventaire après la décès de M. Cluzel, 1896," Archives nationales, Paris, Minutier central des Notaires CXX-976.
- 15 Colloque Degas 1989, 460, 467.
- 16 Christophe Nobile, a frame-maker, restorer, and owner of Maison Samson in Paris, who has closely studied the cockscomb frame preserved at the Musée d'Orsay, Paris, favors the hypothesis of collaboration: "The picture framer Pierre Cluzel, who closely

- collaborated on the creation of the ‘crête de coq’ model, was certainly a ‘chef d’orchestre’ who oversaw the different inventions. These moldings were built up like sculptures and so it is unsurprising that from the sketchbook to the finished product there are evolutions.” Nobile, personal interview, November 25, 2018.
- 17 House 1986, 180, 181, 215.
 - 18 Monet to Octave Maus dated January 18, 1897. Monet is preparing to send three paintings of the Rouen Cathedral to La Libre Esthétique and provides instructions for the handling of his old frames: “I shall be very grateful to you for giving instructions to take care of the frames, they are antique *bordures*, of which I am especially fond.” Quoted in Wildenstein 1979, 292: “Je vous serai très reconnaissant de bien vouloir donner des instructions pour qu’il soit pris soin de mes cadres, ce sont des bordures anciennes auxquelles je tiens tout spécialement.”
 - 19 “que les cadres anciens taillés au ciseau dans le bois dur, et où l’on sent la main de l’ouvrier”; Renoir 1981, 298.
 - 20 “Looking at a pastel by Degas, a stout woman bathing in a chamber, Monet said he valued Degas’s drawing only, and it was a common trick of his to make the frame assist and complete the picture. The picture was sold to Monet with the stipulation from Degas that the frame must be kept.” Theodore Robinson, diary, 1:34 (July 7–8, 1892), Archives, Frick Art Reference Library, New York, <https://arcade.nyarc.org/record=b314567~S6>.
 - 21 Vollard 1937, 65, 66.
 - 22 Ibid., 65. Surviving examples are MMA 29.100.37; Musée d’Orsay, Paris, REC 50.
 - 23 Edgar Degas, *Frieze of Dancers*, ca. 1895. Cleveland Museum of Art, Gift of the Hanna Fund (1946.83).
 - 24 Rewald 2002, 23, 102.
 - 25 Interesting examples are the frames employed by Count Isaac de Camondo that employed the decorative ribbon-and-stick motif of Louis XVI on the back edge, coupled with a more modern flat frieze of the *passe-partout* model.
 - 26 *Tableaux et dessins anciens et du XIX^e siècle: Cadres anciens et de collection*, sale cat., Artcurial, Paris, January 20, 2016, 66, 128, lot 419. As Nobile stated (personal interview, November 25, 2018): “I’ve had the opportunity to have a close examination to a very few (about three different models) of those period frames and I would say these prototype frames were fabricated ‘dans les règles de l’art’ by experienced professionals.”
 - 27 MMA 29.100.37, Musée d’Orsay, Paris, REC 50.
 - 28 Although Millar (1905, 403) was working out of London, he uses the French name for this material, which was called by other names, including “Alabastine” by William Pearce (1898, 265–70) and “economic paste frames” by Isabelle Cahn (1989, 10, 15).
 - 29 Due to the strong connection to architectural plasterwork, my early suspicion at the outset of this research was that frame-makers might have contracted their orders for paste frames out to professionals in the plaster moldings trade. But based on the account of J. Saulo, it seems equally likely that templated paste frames were manufactured in-house by frame-makers. See Saulo and St-Victor 1896, 12, 13.
 - 30 The concept for the bandsaw dates to the beginning of the nineteenth century, but the welding technology of the time was inferior to the rigors of usage. In 1846, Anne Paulin Crepin of France applied for and was granted a patent for a new welding technique that allowed the blades to withstand the stress of cutting and flexing at high speeds. She sold the patent to A. Perin & Company of Paris, which brought modern bandsaws into the mainstream.

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A Source for Two Gilded Silver Figurines by Hans von Reutlingen

ELIZABETH RICE MATTISON

In 1987 and 1991, The Metropolitan Museum of Art acquired a pair of silver-gilt statuettes, a standing bishop and a crowned woman (figs. 1, 2). Each repoussé statuette is finely crafted from silver, with gold highlighting the figures' clothing and decorative elements. The bishop, wearing a miter engraved with flowers, balances a book in his right hand and clasps his left hand around a now-lost object, most likely a crozier. Delicately robed and swaying on her axis, the female figure holds her voluminous dress in her right hand; her left hand is missing. A hole, likely a later modification, pierces her body. The Met purchased both statuettes from the Blumka Gallery in New York, although neither has a recorded provenance before the late twentieth century.¹

fig. 1 Hans von Reutlingen (German, ca. 1465–1547). *Standing Bishop*, ca. 1515. Silver and silver gilt, without pin H. $4\frac{1}{16}$ × W. $1\frac{7}{16}$ × D. $1\frac{3}{16}$ in. (10.3 × 3.6 × 3 cm); with pin 5 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (13.3 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Desmond Gerald Fitzgerald Charitable Fund Gift, 1987 (1987.217)

fig. 2 Hans von Reutlingen. *Standing Female Saint*, ca. 1515. Silver and silver gilt, H. $3\frac{11}{16}$ × W. $1\frac{5}{16}$ × D. $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. (9.4 × 3.6 × 3.1 cm). The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Cloisters Collection, 1991 (1991.9)





fig. 3 Hans von Reutlingen.
Reliquary Bust of Saint Lambert, 1506–12, with
 19th-century additions.
 Silver, gilding, precious
 stones, pearls, wooden core,
 modern polychromy.
 H. 62 $\frac{3}{8}$ × W. 42 $\frac{1}{8}$ × D. 31 $\frac{1}{8}$ in.
 (159 × 107 × 79 cm).
 Cathedral of Saint Paul,
 Trésor de Liège

fig. 4 Detail of *Reliquary
 Bust of Saint Lambert*
 (fig. 3)

When they were purchased, the then-curator in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters Timothy B. Husband recognized that these finely crafted repoussé figurines closely resembled the work of the goldsmith Hans von Reutlingen (ca. 1465–1547). Based in Aachen, Hans von Reutlingen worked for Maximilian I and other important patrons of the Holy Roman Empire.² As Husband identified, the two statuettes appear especially closely related to Hans von Reutlingen’s masterpiece, the monumental reliquary bust of Saint Lambert, made for the Cathedral of Liège and completed in 1512 (fig. 3). One of the largest and highest-quality examples of surviving late Gothic metalwork, the reliquary of Saint Lambert combines an over-lifesize bust of the saint with a gilded silver base of six narrative scenes of the life and death of the martyred seventh-century bishop.³ It is from this base—where many figurines are nestled in the reliquary’s microarchitecture—that the statuettes in The Met have

been proposed to have originated.⁴ On the basis of scale, technique of production, and iconography, however, this article argues that The Met’s two figurines belonged instead to a second, related project made by Hans von Reutlingen for Liège’s cathedral: the largely unknown and presumed destroyed reliquary bust of Saint Anne.

The reliquary bust of Saint Lambert remains an important comparison for dating and attributing the two statuettes at The Met. Stamped on its back with Hans von Reutlingen’s mark, the bust can be firmly dated to between December 31, 1505, when Prince-Bishop Erard de la Marck (1472–1538) contributed thirty marks of silver and gold for its production, and April 28, 1512, when the prince-bishop staged a procession of the finished work in Liège.⁵ As Husband noted, The Met’s figure of the standing bishop closely resembles the repoussé statuettes that fill the niches of the reliquary of Saint Lambert (fig. 4).⁶ Like them, The Met’s bishop



fig. 5 Hans von Reutlingen.
Reliquary Statuette of Saint Anne, before 1516. Silver
 with silver gilt, copper base,
 14 $\frac{3}{16}$ in. (36 cm). Church of
 Our Lady, Teseum, Tongeren



has sunken cheeks, prominent cheekbones, and curved lines around his mouth and between his brows. The mix of sharp, cascading V-shaped folds and simpler, parallel drapery also characterizes both The Met's bishop and the narrative figures on the bust. Eyes with thick upper lids and pouch-like lower ones, defined by deeply incised lines, are typical of Hans von Reutlingen's male representations. The statuette of the bishop, however, cannot belong to this group of narrative figures on the bust, as the latter are larger

in size, measuring about 13 centimeters tall compared to his 10.3 centimeters in height.

In contrast to the weathered and expressive faces of his masculine figures, Hans von Reutlingen's women generally have smooth and rounded countenances. The Met's female saint is closely related to the small Virgin Mary sitting in the arms of her mother in Hans von Reutlingen's reliquary statuette of Saint Anne in the treasury of Tongeren (before 1516) (fig. 5).⁷ Both women have the same, oval faces with flattened sides, smooth and high foreheads, rounded chins, and thin noses. Four reliefs of female saints (ca. 1510), from the treasury of Sint-Matthiaskerk in Maastricht, have the similarly generalized features that define Hans von Reutlingen's oeuvre. All of these female figures share the same flowing, twisted locks parted at the center that cascade in precise rivulets around the face and shoulders, as does the hair down The Met's crowned saint's back (fig. 6).⁸ Hans von Reutlingen's female figures at Tongeren, Maastricht, and Liège have more idealized features and softer drapery than his earlier work, such as the Vienna Coronation Gospels book covers (ca. 1500) and the Kreuznach Crucifix (ca. 1501).⁹ On the basis of its style, the female saint is contemporaneous with the bishop, and both should be dated to the second decade of the sixteenth century.

As noted at the time of their acquisition, the two statuettes most likely originate from the same ensemble. The bishop and crowned woman are similar heights, measuring 10.3 centimeters and 9.4 centimeters respectively; most of the bishop's extra height derives from his projecting miter. They also both stand on identical hexagonal bases.¹⁰ In terms of form, the statuettes' garments are related: the gathering of cloth under the bishop's right arm forms a cascade of indented, triangular shapes like those on the right side of the female figure's lower body, and both figures' sleeves group at the elbows of their outstretched left arms. The two works also share comparable incised patterning indicative of fur on their cloaks. At the feet of both, their robes softly pool around their feet, one of which emerges from the folds of cloth. Elemental analysis of the statuettes carried out in 1987 and 1990 revealed nearly identical metallic composition: the bishop's silver is alloyed with 2 percent copper and the woman's with 2.1 percent copper. Meanwhile, the bishop's gilding contains 5 percent silver and the crowned woman's 4.5 percent silver and .5 percent copper. As conservator Peter Dandridge and curator Timothy B. Husband concluded, this material composition, in addition to the analogous method of manufacture, suggests

fig. 6 Reverse of Standing
Female Saint (fig. 2)

that the statuettes were made by one metalsmith as part of the same project.¹¹

Though they are linked to each other and both are similar to the bust of Saint Lambert, The Met's statuettes cannot belong to the Liège reliquary. When The Met acquired the bishop statuette, it was proposed that it might have once stood at one of the corners of the base where there are today six small bishops posed in the micro-architecture, flanking either side of the narrative niches (see fig. 4). Yet all six of these figures are sand-cast from three molds: Saint Servatius, with a key, and two unknown bishop-saints come from one mold; Saint Hubert, with a hunting horn, and another unknown bishop from a second; and Saint Maternus, holding three miters, from a third.¹² René Sneyers's and Pierre Colman's study of the Liège bust during its 1970–71 conservation described these cast bishops as original to the sixteenth-century reliquary. The Gothic tracery engraved into the cast bishops' miters, moreover, exactly matches that of the larger repoussé figures set in the bust's niches. Certainly, as Husband noted, the cast bishops' facial features and drapery are not as finely detailed as those of the repoussé statuettes. This distinction, however, is due in part to the process of casting. Moreover, their diminutive size necessitates the greater abstraction of their features. It is not surprising that these bishops at the exposed corners are cast, as are almost all of the exterior elements on the Liège reliquary's base, including figures of the twelve apostles, six putti holding the Arma Christi (Instruments of Christ's Passion), baldachins, and columns.¹³ The use of sturdier, cast figures—as opposed to delicate repoussé ones like The Met's—on the outside of the bust suits a reliquary intended for use in processions. The bust's more fragile repoussé figures, meanwhile, are protected inside the deep niches. Based on these compositional and material factors, it seems unlikely that The Met's repoussé bishop originally stood at a corner of the reliquary of Saint Lambert as initially hypothesized.

Technical attributes further separate The Met's statuettes from those of Liège's bust. According to the analysis conducted during the 1970s restoration, the bust's cast figures are alloyed with between 5 and 10 percent copper and the repoussé figures contain 1.5 percent copper, measurements that differ from the silver alloy of The Met's statuettes.¹⁴ Neither The Met's bishop nor the crowned woman is the correct size to stand under the bust's exterior baldachins: the cast bishops are about 8 centimeters tall, shorter than either of The Met's repoussé statuettes. As noted above, it is equally unlikely that The Met's bishop figure belonged



to the narrative niches: the statuettes in the scenes are larger, and none appear to be missing. Although the Lambert bust has had a tumultuous history, most notably its many dislocations during the French Revolution, the main loss to the original reliquary is Lambert's crozier, replaced in 1820 with a reproduction after the sixteenth-century original.¹⁵

With the acquisition of the crowned female figure, Husband began to question the statuettes' direct connection to the Liège bust.¹⁶ There is, after all, no logical place for a female saint on the reliquary of Saint Lambert, whose iconography emphasizes male clerical power. In Liège, which was ruled by an elected

prince-bishop, male prelate saints were especially venerated. As a work commissioned by Erard de la Marck to house the relics of his saintly predecessor, the bust of Saint Lambert manifests this particular devotion. Accordingly, the Liège bust includes representations of Saint Maternus, the fourth-century bishop of Trier, Cologne, and Tongeren (later the diocese of Tongeren-Maastricht-Liège); Saint Servatius, the fourth-century bishop of the diocese and patron saint of Maastricht; and Saint Hubert, the eighth-century bishop who translated Lambert's relics to Liège. Each of the narrative niches concerns a moment in the life or death of Saint Lambert: miracles of his childhood, ordination as bishop, martyrdom before an altar, burial of his body, translation of his relics (see fig. 4), and adoration of his relics. A crowned female saint has no iconographic connection to this program.

Despite the close relationship that the two figurines bear to the reliquary of Saint Lambert and to Hans von Reutlingen's oeuvre more generally, all these factors taken together make it unlikely that they originally belonged to the Liège bust. Still, they may have formed part of a similarly opulent metalwork monument.¹⁷ Indeed, in the diocese of Liège in the sixteenth century, canons, churches, and abbots commissioned several such lavish works from Hans von Reutlingen. In 1515, the goldsmith fashioned a cross for the abbey of Val-Saint-Lambert.¹⁸ Before 1516, he produced three reliquary statuettes for the Church of Our Lady in Tongeren, of Saints Christopher, Sebastian, and Anne.¹⁹ About the same time, Hans von Reutlingen made the seal for the Cathedral of Liège and the seal for Erard de la Marck in 1521.²⁰

One commission drew directly on the example of the reliquary bust of Saint Lambert: in his will, Lambert d'Oupeye (d. 1515), the archdeacon of the Cathedral of Liège, ordered a corresponding reliquary bust of Saint Anne.²¹ Deploring the lack of a reliquary to properly honor the relics of the Virgin's mother, Lambert d'Oupeye offered twenty marks of silver—almost five kilograms—for the reliquary and ten nobles d'or for its gilding. He specified that the bust should be made by Hans von Reutlingen (*magistrum Johannem Aquensem*) or "some other expert goldsmith." Like the bust of Saint Lambert, the reliquary of Saint Anne was to feature a small portrait of the patron "genuflecting before the image," an engraving of his name, and an inscription extolling his piety "that from devotion and love [he] had this image made."²² As Lambert d'Oupeye had served as the chancellor to Erard de la Marck since 1506, in addition to his role as archdeacon of the

cathedral, he would have been intimately familiar with the creation of the bust of Saint Lambert, which offered the explicit inspiration for his own donation.²³

Later documentation attests to the successful creation of Lambert d'Oupeye's reliquary; as he died three weeks after writing his will, the commission was likely carried out by his testamentary executors. An inventory of the cathedral treasury written in 1713 lists "the bust of St. Anne in silver."²⁴ The historian and genealogist of Liège, Louis Abry (1643–1720), described the reliquary more fully during a visit to the cathedral about 1700:

The head of St. Anne, ornamented with a bust of the saint, was given by Monsieur Lambert d'Oupie, canon, archdeacon of Brabant and chancellor, that he ordered in the year 1515 in his will; below this one sees, in effect, his coat of arms, a little St. Anne, a St. Hubert, a St. Remacle, and a St. Léonard and others around the circumference in little figures.²⁵

Although brief, this account points to the key features of the reliquary: Anne's head rested on a base of statuettes of bishop-saints and at least one female saint. Abry probably knew Lambert d'Oupeye's name and title from an inscription on the bust that the archdeacon had mandated be included to commemorate his devotion in the 1515 will. Like the reliquary of Saint Lambert, the bust of Saint Anne possibly formed a part of religious processions in the city. The *Ordo* for the 1526 celebrations of the Feast of the Translation of Saint Lambert references an image of Saint Anne (*imago sanctae Annae*), an expansion of the 1512 procession through the city.²⁶ Although neither Abry nor the 1713 inventory mentions the goldsmith's name, Hans von Reutlingen remained the preeminent metalworker in the prince-bishopric of Liège about 1515, evident in his important projects for the Cathedral of Liège and its surrounding cities mentioned above. It was only at the end of the 1520s and into the 1530s that he was superseded, when the Liégeois goldsmith Léonard van Bommershoven began to receive significant reliquary commissions.²⁷

Could the statuettes in The Met's collection, then, be two remaining fragments of this reliquary? Based on Lambert d'Oupeye's commission and Abry's description, the bust of Saint Anne is a candidate for a devotional object closely related to the Lambert reliquary, by the same or a linked workshop, which included statuettes of both male clerical and female saints. The joining of a male bishop and a crowned woman makes more sense in terms of iconography on the bust of Saint Anne than on that of Saint Lambert. Although Abry stops

short of listing all the subsidiary statuettes, other female saints might have completed the crowd of miniatures on the base. Moreover, a company of high-quality repoussé figures like The Met's statuettes would have corrected Lambert d'Oupeye's lament that Saint Anne's relics were not appropriately housed in a finely crafted reliquary.

Without further context or archival evidence, it is difficult to specifically identify either of The Met's saints. In his left hand, the bishop likely held a crozier, which slid through his clasped fist to rest in the slight depression at his feet. While Hubert, Lambert, and Servatius have distinctive iconographies in Liège—represented by a horn, a rational (also called a superhumeral, the liturgical vestment worn over the shoulders), and a key, respectively—other local bishop-saints such as Gondolphus, Remaclus, and Adalbert varied in their representations.²⁸ The name of the crowned female saint is equally uncertain, due to her missing left hand, which likely once held her identifying attribute. Catherine, Agnes, and Barbara all enjoyed popular cults of devotion in Liège, as they did across Europe about 1500. Saints such as Madelberte, Apollonia, and Dymphna—all of whose relics were housed in the Cathedral of Liège—were more specific to the diocese and were often depicted as crowned women.²⁹ Any of these men and women may have surrounded the bust of Saint Anne, encircling her in an assembly of fellow saints.

Saint Anne's bust, along with the majority of the great treasury of the Cathedral of Liège, was lost during the French Revolution. The cathedral itself was reduced to rubble. Although much of Liège's treasury was evacuated in 1794 to Hamburg for safekeeping, Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord seized it in 1803 and sold the majority of the objects in June of that

year.³⁰ In an inventory made on March 30, 1803, ahead of the public auction, the last trace of the bust of Saint Anne appears, valued at 4,350 francs and weighing 225 marks.³¹ Talleyrand returned only a few of the most precious reliquaries to Liège, including the bust of Saint Lambert and the famous votive image of Charles the Bold. The reliquary of Saint Anne, meanwhile, may have been disassembled before or following its sale by the French. This would not have been uncommon: a letter to the French minister Charles-Frédéric Reinhard in 1803 suggested removing all the pearls from the Liégeois vestments so that they could be sold separately to increase profits.³² Whether the bust of Saint Anne was similarly broken apart, partially melted, or auctioned off as a whole, its fate in the 1803 auction remains unknown. The Met's statuettes of a bishop and crowned woman are rare examples of the highest-quality metalwork of the early sixteenth century from northern Europe. They may be all that survives of an important reliquary made for the Cathedral of Liège.

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NOTES

- 1 The provenance of the pieces is as follows: for 1987.217: Thomas F. Flannery, Jr., Chicago; (sold, Sotheby Parke Bernet, & Co., London, December 1, 1983, lot 22); [Blumka II Gallery, New York]. For 1991.9: (Sotheby's, Geneva, May 14, 1990, lot 72); [Blumka II Gallery, New York].
- 2 Husband, report, June 1, 1987, object file for MMA 1987.217 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters.
- 3 The best published source on the bust remains Colman 1973–74; see also Colman 1963; Colman 1966, 94–100; Grimme 1999, 33–47; and Bruni et al. 2020, 297–313.
- 4 For this attribution, see Husband 1999, 221, and Lefftz 2016, 28. The statuettes are mentioned in George 2017, 294. Only Pierre Colman (1996, 498–503) disputed the attribution to the bust. I thank Philippe George for bringing this article to my attention in his review.
- 5 Colman 1973–74, 41.
- 6 Husband, report June 1, 1987, object file for MMA 1987.217 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters.
- 7 For the Tongeren statuette see Van Molle and Grimme 1960–61, 94–99; Grimme 1999, 49–53; De Rynck 2016, 65; and Mattison 2020, 202.
- 8 The four female figures are currently on loan from the treasury of Sint-Matthiaskerk to the treasury of Sint-Servaas in Maastricht. These reliefs likely once belonged to a shrine, reliquary, or other larger ensemble. See Grimme 1980–81, 29–30, nos. 7–10; and Grimme 1999, 72–76.
- 9 Respectively, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Weltliche Schatzkammer, Vienna, WS XIII 18; and Pfarrkirche Sankt Nikolaus, Bad Kreuznach. See Grimme 1999, 17–32.
- 10 A long screw is attached to the base of the bishop as a means of affixing it to a larger object. Husband and Peter Dandridge, technical examination of 1987.217, May 12, 1987, object file for MMA 1987.217 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters.
- 11 As noted in the examination of the female statuette, both figures have been regilded, accounting for the variation in their alloys. Husband and Dandridge, technical examination of 1987.217, May 12, 1987, object file for MMA 1987.217 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters; Husband and Dandridge, technical examination of 1991.9, November 19, 1990, object file for MMA 1991.9 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters.
- 12 Colman 1973–74, 66.
- 13 Ibid., 65.
- 14 Sneyers 1973–74, 85.
- 15 The original was presumably lost during or after the French Revolution and was re-created from an engraving of the bust by Michel Natalis (1653). The current polychromy of the face of Saint Lambert is also modern, although there are older paint layers beneath it. Colman 1973–74, 45–46.
- 16 Husband, note, November 15, 1990, object file for MMA 1991.9 in the Department of Medieval Art and The Cloisters.
- 17 While maintaining their attribution to the reliquary bust of Saint Lambert, Husband (1999, 221) began to suggest that they may have an alternate origin.
- 18 The cross was remade just thirteen years later by the great Liégeois goldsmith Léonard van Bommershoven; see the payment records in accounts of the abbey of Val-Saint-Lambert, T30, R324, fol. 32r, Archives de l'Etat, Liège, Belgium. See also Yernaux 1933, 106–7; Colman 1966, 60; and Grimme 1999, 125.
- 19 All three remain in situ. Colman 1966, 102; Grimme 1999, 54–57.
- 20 The seal for the prince-bishop was made following his elevation to cardinal in 1520. Grimme 1980–81, 44; Grimme 1999, 109–10.
- 21 The bust of Saint Anne is briefly noted in Poncelet 1935, 3–4; Colman 1963, 17; Colman 1966, 100–101; and Grimme 1999, 53.
- 22 Lambert d'Oupeye, will dated July 19, 1515, Cathédrale, Secretariat, T22, R22, fols. 51r–51v, Archives de l'Etat, Liège, Belgium: “Do et lego vigniti marchas argenti et decem nobilia auri ad deaurandum / partim cum rosa et partim sine rosa / Ita tamen quod in pede dicte imaginis sint arma mea posta / et ego genuflexo per imaginem paruulam in habitus / et in corinte pedis sculptum nomen et cognomen meum / quod ex deuotione et amore hius imaginem fieri feci / et pro manus liberalitate ad decus ecclesie ostendenda volo quod manufactura per magistrum Johannem Aquensem / aut per quemuis alium” (I give and entrust twenty marks of silver and ten nobles of gold for the gilding / partly with the rose and partly without the rose / regardless, in the foot of the said image let my arms be put there, and with myself genuflecting before the image smaller in size / and in corner of the base my name and forename engraved / that from devotion and love I had this image made / and through the kindness / generosity of [my] hand exhibited to the glory of the church I will that [it be] manufactured by the master John of Aachen / or by some other expert goldsmith from the money released of my execution [of my testament] unless I myself do this in life).
- 23 For a brief biography of Lambert d'Oupeye, see Hansotte 1984, 525.
- 24 “Le buste de sainte Anne d'argent.” Demarteau 1882, 324.
- 25 “Le chef de sainte Anne, orné d'un buste d'argent de cette sainte, a été donné par M. Lambert d'Oupie, chanoine, archidiaacre de Brabant et chancelier, qu'il ordonna l'an 1515, par son testament; au dessous duquel se voit, en effet, son écusson, une petite sainte Anne, un saint Hubert, un saint Remacle, un saint Léonard et autres dans la circonférence, en petites figures.” Abry 1867, 305.
- 26 *Imago sanctae Annae* could also refer to a statue of Saint Anne rather than to the bust. For the Ordo of 1526, see Saumery 1740, xxiii. For the Ordo of 1512, see Bruyère 2012, 174–75. On the procession, see also Harsin 1955, 310.
- 27 These include the lost reliquary casket of Saint Théodard (1526–28) for the cathedral as well as four surviving reliquary statuettes in Tongeren (1530–34). On the status of Léonard van Bommershoven and his relationship to Hans von Reutlingen, see Mattison 2020, 202–3.
- 28 Numerous bishop-saints were revered in Liège in the sixteenth century, including Amand, Augustine, Blaise, Denis, Domitian of Huy, Eligius, Floribert, Macarius of Jerusalem, Malo, Martin of Maastricht, Monulphus of Tongeren-Maastricht, Nicaise of Reims, and Willibrod, among others.
- 29 For a list of the relics in the Cathedral of Liège before the French Revolution, see George 2013, 128–41.
- 30 Some clerics stored parts of the treasury elsewhere in the German states; for instance, Jean-Nicolas de Ghisels, the former head of the cathedral school, took the reliquary of the True Cross and a Byzantine icon of the Virgin to Münster in 1794. After his death in 1826, the relics remained in Münster until the cathedral chapter of Liège successfully sued for their return in 1840. Puraye 1940, 60–64; George 2013, 76.
- 31 It is noted: “Une caisse contenant la figure de Ste. Anne.” This valuation is about the same as that of the votive image of Charles the Bold, whereas the bust of Saint Lambert, weighing 424 marks, was appraised at 9,912 francs. Puraye 1940, 92.
- 32 Ibid., 94.

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